

Proverbs 4:23 Commentary

Proverbs Overview

Purpose of Proverbs 1:1-7	Proverbs to Youth 1:8-9:18	Proverbs of Solomon 10:1-24:34	Proverbs of Solomon (Hezekiah) 25:1-29:27	Words of Agur 30:1-30:33	Words of Lemuel 31:1-31:31	
	Father's Exhortations	First Collection of Solomon	Second Collection of Solomon	Numerical Proverbs	Wisdom for Leaders 31:1-9	Virtuous Wife 31:10-31
Title: Proverbs 1:1	Precepts of Wisdom	Proverbs of Solomon	Proverbs Copied by Hezekiah's Men	Proverbs of Agur	Proverbs of Lemuel 31:1-9	Capable Wife 31:10-31
Theme: Proverbs 1:7	Wisdom for Young Men	Proverbs for Everyone		Personal Notes from Agur & Lemuel		
Prologue	Principles of Wisdom			Epilogue		
Commend Wisdom	Counsel of Wisdom			Comparisons of Wisdom		

Proverbs 4:23 **Watch** ([Qal Imperative](#)) over your [heart](#) with [all diligence](#), for from it flow the [springs](#) of [life](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Amplified: **Keep and guard** your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life. ([Lockman](#))

CEV: **Carefully guard** your thoughts because they are the source of true life. (cp 2Co 10:5) ([CEV](#))

Darby: **Keep** thy heart more than anything that is guarded; for out of it are the issues of life.

ESV: **Keep** your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. ([ESV](#))

GWT: **Guard** your heart more than anything else, because the source of your life flows from it. ([GWT](#))

ICB: **Be very careful about** what you think. Your thoughts run your life. ([ICB: Nelson](#))

KJV: **Keep** thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Knox: **Use all thy watchfulness** to keep thy heart true; that is the fountain whence life springs.

MLB (Berkley): Above all that you guard, **watch** over your heart, for out of it are the sources of life.

NAB: **With closest custody, guard** your heart, for in it are the sources of life. (Pr 2:1, 4:10)

NEB: **Guard** your heart more than any treasure, for it is the source of life.

NET: **Guard** your heart with all vigilance, for from it are the sources of life. ([NET Bible](#))

NIV: **Above all else, guard** your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. ([NIV - IBS](#))

NKJV: Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

NJB: **More than all else, keep watch** over your heart, since here are the wellsprings of life. ([NJB](#))

NLT: **Above all else, guard** your heart, for it affects everything you do. [Hebrew for from it flow the springs of life.] ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

TEV: **Be careful how you think;** your life is shaped by your thoughts.

Young's Literal: **Above every charge keep thy heart,** For out of it are the outgoings of life.

In my experience the **Septuagint (LXX)** can often serve as somewhat of a "mini-commentary" on the Hebrew passage that it translates. One has to use discretion as the Septuagint translation of some passages are strikingly different from the corresponding

Hebrew. In the case of Pr 4:23, the Greek translation of the Hebrew is illuminating. Below is the Septuagint with brief comments for amplification.

Pase (all without exception) **phulake** (noun: as an action = guarding, watch; a person who stayed on watch at a guard post like our modern sentinel, cp "guard" in Acts 12:10 - see related verb that is the root of phulake = **phulasso**) **terei** (tereo = speaks of guarding something in one's possession, watching as one would something precious, continually observing attentively. The present imperative is a command calling for us to make this our habitual practice cp "guarding" in Acts 12:6) **sen** (possessive adjective = your) **kardian** (see word study on kardia = heart, see also discussion of heart on this page) **gar** (for) **ek** (out of, from) **touton** (this) **exodoi** (see word study on exodos--a departure, here in plural = outgoings) **zoes** (see word study on **zoe** -- absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical).

Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint reads

Keep your heart with the utmost care; for out of these are the issues of life.

My translation of the Septuagint

With all guarding continually keep watching your heart for out of this [is the] departure (exodus) of supernatural life.

Comment: The verb Tereo in the present imperative is a clear call for our necessity to renounce self-effort and rely on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to obey this command continually. It is impossible naturally! But it is Him-possible supernaturally!

Here are some other paraphrases of Proverbs 4:23...

Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do. (NLT)

Guard your heart above anything else you have, because it determines the kind of life you will live.

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts. (TEV)

The Pulpit Commentary says that one interpretation of this verse is that

above all things that have to be guarded, keep or guard thy heart.

As **Wiersbe** wisely observes...

The heart is the "master-control" of the life; a **wrong heart** always produces a **wrong life**. To allow **sin into the heart** is to pollute the entire life... "The unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates. The Lord is pondering (examining) our lives (Pr 5:21, 15:3, Je 17:10, 2Chr 16:9), and we must examine them too (cp 2Co 13:5). Live in God's Word and He will protect your path, direct your path, and perfect your path, for the glory of Jesus Christ. (Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books)

D Paul Montague has an interesting paraphrase of Pr 4:23...

Be careful how you think, because your thinking results in actions that have either a positive or negative affect upon your territory (sphere of influence).

Pastor Greg Allen has a pithy introduction to his sermon on Pr 4:23...

Theme: We must be diligent to keep our hearts; because the condition of our heart will affect everything else in our life... I was sitting in my car in a parking lot in Seaside some time ago, sipping coffee and reading a book. And I heard a noise that caused me to look up and see one of those funny sights that could only be seen in high-tech, sophisticated America. There was an SUV next to me with a seagull perched on the hood. He was cocking his head back and forth in absolute bewilderment at the car beneath him; while from under the hood came a loud, authoritative, mechanical voice repeating the command, "PLEASE BACK AWAY FROM THE VEHICLE".

"Car alarms" and other such security devices are a part of the modern world; but human diligence is still very much needed. I read once about a Portland man who had a security device in his car that prevented someone from driving away with it. But he kept noticing that though his car was safely parked on his driveway, parts from his car were slowly disappearing. He kept vigil until he heard the sound of tinkering beneath his car. Then, he ran out just in time to catch a thief by surprise as he paid his regular night-time visit to steal engine parts.

It seems that life all around us is filled with reasons to be on our guard, and to protect ourselves from loss or

damage or theft with respect to our material goods. And of course, in a post-9/11 world, we have an even greater sense of the need to be on the alert. But what about spiritual matters? The things that concern our inner man are far more important and eternally consequential than the material goods we might be able to protect. Out of all the areas in life that force us to take "security measures", the Bible presents our effort to protect our heart as the most important of all. If you effectively protect your car from theft, your home from burglary, your property from damage, your financial interests from failure, and your body from personal illness and injury, and even our borders from terrorist attacks - and yet fail in protecting this one, all-important thing as the Bible warns us - that singular failure will effect all other areas of life. The plain fact is that more personal ruin and eternal loss has been caused by a failure to protect this one thing than all failures to protect material matters combined. And yet, hardly anyone gives a single thought to "keeping the heart". ([Keep Your Heart, Proverbs 4:23 Sermon Greg Allen - Bethany Bible Church](#))

WATCH OVER YOUR HEART

- Mt 26:41 1Pe 1:13, 5:8, 9, 10, Pr 22:5; 23:19; 28:26; Dt 4:9; Ps 139:23,24; Jer 17:9; Mt 15:18,19 Mk 14:38; He 12:15)

Take a Moment to meditate on Proverbs 4:23 as you ponder the inestimable importance of guarding your heart Play Red Mountain Music's beautiful rendition of [Lord, Dissolve My Frozen Heart — Red Mt Music \(their works are superbly God Glorifying\)](#)

Here are a few suggested observations you will want to make on this text - It would make a great sermon text (perhaps even a sermon series!). When does a person die? In medical terms, it's when the heart ceases to beat. If that's true in physical life, how important is the "heart" in our spiritual life? Pr 4:23 is the answer to that vitally important question! Solomon begins with a command to **watch over!** Remember that if God gives us a command, He will enable us to carry out the command, so don't make excuses that this is too difficult a thing for you to accomplish! (E.g., don't start blaming your parents, your horrible social background, even your depraved past [assuming you are a new creature - 2Co 5:17-note, cp Php 3:13-note remembering that Paul was at one time in agreement with Stephen's murder! Acts 7:58, 59). The point is that God says "**Watch over**" then we can watch over it. It is not optional. You are responsible. You need to determine what specific vulnerabilities you need to "watch over" because we each have different besetting sins (cp Heb 12:1-note). So like the Nike commercial says "**Just Do It!**" Why is it so vital? As someone has said our heart is like the "kernel of a nut" or like the internal citadel of our soul. Our heart controls all of our life, serving as the well spring of all our actions, and the center and seat of all the principles that undergird how we behave. In short, the heart controls our actions, our actions determine our habits and our habits are "warp and woof" (the foundation) of our character not our reputation (reputation being what others think about us, character being what God knows to be true about us). **Why do we need to be constantly on guard?** Clearly the implication is that the citadel of is one which can be easily taken by crafty adversaries like Satan (Recall Ge 3:1!) who prowls around (1Pe 5:8-note, 1Pe 5:9-note) continually looking for a "chink" in our armor with his goal being to take back lost ground (cp Ep 4:26, 27-note where "**opportunity**" is topos = territory, land, a defined place, an area = a foothold from which to launch further attacks as is true in real warfare!). We must not forget that our heart is easily deceived (cp Jer 17:9, cp Jesus' warning = Mt 26:41, cp deception of Ananias and Sapphira = Acts 5:3) and when the citadel of the heart is "overrun" or taken by the enemy (the **world**, the **flesh** or the **devil**), our whole man suffers defeat! So we need to be diligent with all keeping and before all else we must give priority to the protecting our heart. Most of us who are over 50 are careful to watch our cholesterol intake so that we might decrease our chances of heart attack. We need the same sober, serious approach to guarding our spiritual heart, even as one would protect a precious source of drinking water in the arid middle east so that it does not become polluted or poisoned by enemies! In short, we need to guard our heart, because our spiritual heart is the starting point for every spiritual aspect of our life. Don't be deceived by sin (See The Deceitfulness of Sin), for all of us, even the most godly among us, has some residual, innate propensity toward moral failure, some weak point, some potential opening for sin to pierce our moral armor. The solution? **Continually watch over your heart!**

In the Pentateuch we see a similar charge...

Only **give heed** (Niphal [passive] imperative - a command) to yourself and **keep** your soul diligently (exceedingly, very greatly), lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. (Dt 4:9)

Solomon is giving us one of the most important practical duties of the Christian life. All other duties pale in comparison to guarding our hearts, for our heart affects everything we are, everything we say and everything we do.

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery writes that...

In essence a guard symbolizes protection and watchfulness. His entire occupation requires him to encompass

and shield his charge from harm or to restrain prisoners from escape...

In Proverbs we read variously about how understanding will guard the wise person (Pr 2:11) and about the need to guard understanding (Pr 4:13; cf. 7:2), one's heart (Pr 4:23), lips (Pr 13:3), mouth (Pr 21:23) and soul (Pr 22:5). Equally metaphoric is the picture of how "righteousness guards the man of integrity" (Pr 13:6 NIV).

John Angell James has a nice devotional summary of Proverbs 4:23...

Guard your heart!"

Above all else, guard your heart; for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23

The heart is...

the great vital spring of the soul,

the fountain of actions,

the center of principle,

the seat of motives

The heart is the center of the thoughts and feelings—out of which conduct comes.

The heart must be the first, chief, constant object of solicitude to the Christian. It is this which God sees, and because God principally looks at it, the heart must be ever uppermost in our concern.

To keep the heart must mean exerting ourselves with great earnestness, in dependence upon Divine grace, to preserve it in a good state; laboring to preserve its vitality, vigor, and purity.

The heart is the citadel of the soul. If this is neglected, the enemy at the gates will soon be in and take possession. Set a watch, therefore, upon the heart. Let the sentinel be never off duty, nor sleeping at his post.

Keep out evil thoughts, and unholy affections, and vile imaginations. Without great vigilance they will elude observation. As soon as an enemy of this kind is detected, he must be seized and made captive, until every thought is brought into subjection to Christ.

As the state of the heart is, so is the man in reality—and before God. Guard your heart! (From [Jewels from James](#))

Can I ask you a candid question? Is the seductive, deceptive lure of some sin such as anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, sexual immorality, etc, knocking at the door of your heart, dear saint? Are you getting ready to be captured by your own iniquities, bound by the cords of your own sin (Pr 5:22)? If so, than prayerfully, meditatively, take just a few moments (3' 43") and...

LISTEN TO "GUARD YOUR HEART"

[Click here](#) to listen to **Steve Green's** soul piercing rendition of **Guard Your Heart**. Dear brother (or sister), if you are "toying" (an oxymoron for this is not "child's play"!) with and making provision for an "affair" (A euphemism which is far too kind! Cp Ro 13:14-note, Gal 5:16-note; Gal 5:17-note), then take just a few moments and please listen carefully to the words of Steve's song and as you listen ponder the consequences in David's life - notice especially the last 2 verses in the following passages! (David's sin with Bathsheba and some of the consequences = 2Sa 11:1,2, 3, 4, 5, 12:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 13:1, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 28, 29, 30, 31). As Steve Green rightly and passionately sings

"As a payment for pleasure it is a high price to pay "!

Remember that when sin comes in at the door of a person's life, it eventually moves to the inner chambers and takes over.

If King David could speak to us today (and of course he is in one sense for the word is living and active, Heb 4:12-note, 1Pe 1:23-note), I have no doubt he would say that he would gladly forgo that 15-30 minutes of pleasure he had with Bathsheba on that fateful night, if the terrible consequences of his sin could be erased. O, dear beloved brother (or sister!) in Christ, if you are being tempted in this area, as you read this note, know that I have prayed for you that the Spirit would quicken your **heart**, renew your **mind** and empower your **will** to turn around and away from the potential devastation you are about to enter into to because of the deceitfulness (Heb 3:13-note) of this pleasurable (Heb 11:25-note) but tragic sin of **porneia**. Guard your heart --- for your God, for your wife and children, for your reputation, for the Lord's reputation, and remember that one day we will all stand before the Lord of Glory and give account for the deeds in the body (for believers at 2Cor 5:10 or unbelievers at Rev 20:11, 12, 13, 14, 15-[see notes](#)). See a related topic - **Covenant: As It Relates to Marriage**

Watch (command, not a suggestion) (05341) (**natsar**) means to guard, keep, observe, hide, preserve, hide. Many of the uses of **natsar** are nuanced by the object that is being watched or guarded. The first use in Ex 34:7 speaks of God keeping His faithfulness! **Natsar** is used with a similar sense of keeping faithfulness in “keeping” the covenant (Dt. 33:9); “keeping” the law (Ps. 105:45); “keeping” the rules of parents (Pr. 6:20).

Walter Kaiser on **natsar** -

This verb appears approximately sixty times.

Examination of the objects protected assists in assigning to it a proper semantical range. First material things such as agricultural or military installations (e.g. a vineyard, Job 27:18; a fig tree, Prov 27:18; fortifications, Nah 2:2) are guarded. Those who are employed in these functions are called watchmen (Qal active plural participle *nōšērîm*, Jer 31:6; II Kgs 17:9; 18:8). The Lord himself is regarded as a keeper or watchman over his vineyard Israel and over all men in general (Isa 27:3; Job 7:20).

Secondly in an ethical sense, the mouth (Prov 13:3; Ps 141:3), one's path in life (Prov 16:17), the heart (Prov 4:23), and the tongue (Ps 34:13) are guarded.

Thirdly, there is the concept of “guarding with fidelity.” It usually centers around observing the covenant or the law of the Lord. The Lord himself is the one keeping loyal love (*ḥesed*) to thousands of generations (Ex 34:7). But mortal men are also responsible for observing the covenant (Deut 33:9; Ps 25:10) and the precepts or law of God (Ps 78:7; 105:45; 119:2, 22, 33, 34, 56, 69, 100, 115, 129, 145). Even the commands of parents (Prov 6:20; 28:7) and the discipline of wisdom (Prov 3:1, 21; 4:13; 5:2) require the same kind of faithful observance.

God is spoken of as guarding from danger or preserving a man's life (Ps 25:20; 40:12; Prov 24:12), the king (Ps 61:8), peace (Isa 26:3), Israel (Deut 32:10; Isa 42:6; 49:8), the faithful and their lives (Ps 31:24; Prov 2:8), and knowledge (Prov 22:12). The Lord also protects the righteous from this generation (Ps 12:8), trouble (Ps 32:7), the secret plots of the wicked (Ps 64:2), and violent men (Ps 140:2, 5).

Wisdom keeps those who do not forsake her (Prov 4:6). So discretion watches over her children (Prov 2:11) and righteousness watches over her (Prov 13:6).

In three instances, *nāṣar* is used of guarding in the sense of “keeping secret.” In Isa 48:6 it refers to hidden things previously not revealed by God. In two other passages the meaning is negative. The “secret places” of sin where rebellious Israel spends her nights incubating (i.e. sleeping with the idols in order to receive dreams about the future, Isa 65:4) and the secret or crafty mindedness of a seductress (Prov 7:10).

Another meaning is of keeping closed or blockaded cities under attack. In Jer 4:16, the Qal plural active participle seems to refer to the blockaders themselves, while in Ezk 6:12(?) and Isa 1:8 it points to the besieged or blockaded city.

Taken altogether, it is no wonder that Isaiah calls the revived tribes of Israel in that eschatological era the preserved of Israel (49:6), for they surely have experienced the constant protection and preservation of the Lord. ([Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament](#))

Scripture uses **natsar** to describe men guarding truths about God. For example...

Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth To those who **keep** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) His covenant and His testimonies.

Psalm 119:2 How blessed are those who **observe** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart.

Psalm 119:22 Take away reproach and contempt from me, For I **observe** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) Thy testimonies.

Psalm 119:33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Thy statutes, And I shall **observe** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) it to the end.

Psalm 119:34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, And **keep** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) it with all my heart.

Psalm 119:100 I understand more than the aged, Because I have **observed** (**Lxx = ekzeteo** = exert effort to find out, to seek) Thy precepts.

Psalm 119:129 Thy testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul **observes** (**Lxx = exereunao** = search out, examine, investigate) them.

Proverbs 3:1 My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart **keep** (**Lxx = tereo** = keep in view, keep inviolate, guard) my commandments;

Baker - The word (**natsar**) refers to people's maintaining things entrusted to them, especially to keeping the truths of God in both actions and mind (Ps. 119:100, 115). God's Word is to be kept with our whole hearts (Ps. 119:69); our hearts, in turn, ought to be maintained in a right state (Pr. 4:23). The word also refers to keeping speech under control (Ps. 34:13 [14]; 141:3); the maintenance of a tree (Pr. 27:18); the work of God's character (Ps. 40:11[12]); its reflection in humans as preserving them (Ps. 25:21; Pr. 2:11). Sometimes the word refers directly to God's preservation and maintenance of His people (Pr. 24:12; Isa. 49:8). The passive participle form of the verb describes an adulteress' heart as guarded or kept secret (Pr. 7:10). It also describes a city as guarded or besieged (Isa. 1:8). The active participle is used to signify a watchman (2Kgs. 17:9; Jer. 31:6). ([Complete Word Study Dictionary- Old Testament - recommended](#))

Vine - Natsar is frequently used to express the idea of "guarding" something, such as a vineyard (Isa. 27:3) or a fortification (Nah. 2:1). "To watch" one's speech is a frequent concern, so advice is given "to watch" one's mouth (Pr. 13:3), the tongue (Ps. 34:13), and the lips (Ps. 141:3). Many references are made to God as the one who "preserves" His people from dangers of all kinds (Deut. 32:10; Ps. 31:23). Generally, natsar is a close synonym to the much more common verb, shamar, "to keep, tend."

TWOT - Examination of the objects protected assists in assigning to it a proper semantical range. **First** material things such as agricultural or military installations (e.g. a vineyard, Job 27:18; a fig tree, Pr 27:18; fortifications, Nah 2:2) are guarded. Those who are employed in these functions are called watchmen (Qal active plural participle nōsērīm, Jer 31:6; 2Kgs 17:9; 18:8). The Lord himself is regarded as a keeper or watchman over his vineyard Israel and over all men in general (Isa 27:3; Job 7:20). **Secondly** in an ethical sense, the mouth (Pr 13:3; Ps 141:3), one's path in life (Pr 16:17), the heart (Pr 4:23), and the tongue (Ps 34:14) are guarded. **Thirdly**, there is the concept of "guarding with fidelity." It usually centers around observing the covenant or the law of the Lord. The Lord himself is the one keeping loyal love (hesed) to thousands of generations (Ex 34:7). But mortal men are also responsible for observing the covenant (Deut 33:9; Ps 25:10) and the precepts or law of God (Ps 78:7; 105:45; 119:2, 22, 33, 34, 56, 69, 100, 115, 129, 145). Even the commands of parents (Pr 6:20; 28:7) and the discipline of wisdom (Pr 3:1, 21; 4:13; 5:2) require the same kind of faithful observance. **God is spoken of as guarding** from danger or preserving a man's life (Ps 25:20; 40:12; Pr 24:12), the king (Ps 61:8), peace (Isa 26:3), Israel (Deut 32:10; Isa 42:6; 49:8), the faithful and their lives (Ps 31:24; Pr 2:8), and knowledge (Pr 22:12). The Lord also protects the righteous from this generation (Ps 12:8), trouble (Ps 32:7), the secret plots of the wicked (Ps 64:2), and violent men (Ps 140:2, 5). **Wisdom** keeps those who do not forsake her (Pr 4:6). So discretion watches over her children (Pr 2:11) and righteousness watches over her (Pr 13:6). In three instances, **nātsar** is used of guarding in the sense of "keeping secret." In Isa 48:6 it refers to hidden things previously not revealed by God. In two other passages the meaning is negative. The "secret places" of sin where rebellious Israel spends her nights incubating (i.e. sleeping with the idols in order to receive dreams about the future, Isa 65:4) and the secret or crafty mindedness of a seductress (Pr 7:10). Another meaning is of keeping closed or blockaded cities under attack. In Jer 4:16, the Qal plural active participle seems to refer to the blockaders themselves, while in Ezek 6:12(?) and Isa 1:8 it points to the besieged or blockaded city. Taken altogether, it is no wonder that Isaiah calls the revived tribes of Israel in that eschatological era the preserved of Israel (49:6), for they surely have experienced the constant protection and preservation of the Lord. ([Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament- R Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer Jr., Bruce K Waltke- Recommended](#))

Natsar - 57x in the OT- Ex 34:7; Deut 33:9; Job 7:20; 27:18; Ps 12:7; 25:10, 21; 31:23; 32:7; 34:13; 40:11; 61:7; 64:1; 78:7; 105:45; 119:2, 22, 33-34, 56, 69, 100, 115, 129, 145; 140:1, 4; 141:3; Pr 2:8, 11; 3:1, 21; 4:6, 13, 23; 5:2; 6:20; 7:10; 13:3, 6; 16:17; 20:28; 22:12; 24:12; 27:18; 28:7; Isa 1:8; 26:3; 27:3; 42:6; 48:6; 49:8; 65:4; Jer 4:16; 31:6; Ezek 6:12; Nah 2:1. **NAS Usage:** besieged(2), Besiegers(1), cunning(1), guard(2), guarding(1), guards(2), hidden things(1), keep(7), keep watch(1), keeper(1), keeps(3), kept(1), man(1), observe(10), observed(1), observes(1), preserve(10), preserves(1), reserve(1), secret places(1), tends(1), watch(4), watcher(1), watches(1), watchman(1), watchmen(1). For example...

Isaiah 26:3 "The steadfast of mind You will **keep** (Heb = natsar; Lxx = **phulasso** = guard) in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.

Men will only guard what is valuable. There are not many guards posted at the local city dump, but there are armed guards and security measures at the bank or the expensive jewelry store, because of the great value in these places. This basic human principle says something about God's view of the heart. He knows that the heart is of great value to Him and to the one who possesses it. And thus the **command** to **watch** our heart as one would the wealthiest bank in the world. The integrity and vitality of our spiritual lives depend on it!

**Are you guarding your heart 24/7?
Or do you just guard your heart on Sunday mornings?**

In short, the Hebrew word **natsar** is a command calling for continual watching and can even refer to a watchman on security duty. Note also that **watching** includes two things, one, that you keep noxious pollutants from coming in, and secondly, that you keep anything good from being stolen. Both are relevant when it comes to guarding one's heart.

William Cowper gives us an example of how something good is stolen from our heart...

We may mark it by experience, that the **Word** is first stolen either out of the mind (heart) of man, and the remembrance of it is away; or at least out of the affection of man; so that the reverence of it is gone, before a man can be drawn to the committing of a sin. So long as Eve kept by faith the Word of the Lord, she resisted Satan; but from the time she doubted of that, which God made most certain by His Word, at once she was snared.

UBS Handbook on Proverbs says that "In some languages this is expressed as "Watch your mind," "Keep a hand on your head," or "Take care of your thoughts." NJB translates "More than all else, keep watch over your heart," and NJPSV (New Jewish Publication Society Version) has "More than all that you guard, guard your mind." We may also say, for example, "The most important thing you can do is be careful what you think" or "The most important ... is to think good thoughts." ([Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. A handbook on Proverbs. The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series](#))

Toy writes that "The Hebrew in first line reads: **more than all guarding** (= "with more vigilant guarding than in any other case") watch thou over thy heart, = "watch thy heart (or, thyself) more than anything else"; the same general sense is given by the rendering: above all that thou guardest, etc. (De., RV. marg.), but this signification ("the thing guarded") the word has not elsewhere in OT. A better sense is given by the Greek reading: with all watching guard etc., that is, in every way, with all possible vigilance and diligence (so AV., RV.).(Toy, C. H. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the book of Proverbs. 1899)

Watch over ([05341](#)) (Qal Imperative = Command) means to watch, preserve, guard from dangers; guard with fidelity; keep secret and close, blockade. This verb is related to a word which describes a prison guard keeping watch over a prisoner in a cell (posting a guard, a guard-house, a guard post). As noted, in Hebrew (and in Greek) this injunction is in the form of a **command**. If God commands it, then we can carry it out (in His power, Zech 4:6, Gal 5:16-note, Eph 5:18-note) and therefore we have no excuse to not comply! **What is your excuse?** Solomon sadly failed to carry out the very command the Spirit of God inspired him to pen! (see the following section). **Watching over our heart** is not an addendum or elective for those who are called to be holy as He is holy (1Pe 1:15, 16- notes)! It speaks of the exercise of serious, vigilant, careful diligence in "keeping an eye on" and protecting the heart.

Our heart is in the center of our inner man (phrase found in NASB in Ro 7:22, 2Co 4:16, Eph 3:16), **so how can we possibly watch over something we cannot envision? What comes into the inner man?** Input especially from the eyes but also from the ears. It follows that we watch over our heart by watching over these strategic entry points, **in the following practical ways...**

PURPOSE IN YOUR HEART TO LOVE GOD AS A CHILD DOES THEIR FATHER

AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR **HEART**, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' (Mark 12:30)

Comment: We're to love God with all our heart (Dt 6:5) and receive His Word into our hearts (Pr 7:1, 2, 3). God wants us to do His will from our hearts (Ep 6:6). If our heart is wrong toward God, our entire life will be wrong, no matter how successful we may appear to others. (Wiersbe, W. W. Be responsible).

Hate evil, you who love the LORD (cp Mk 12:30, 31, 1Jn 4:19, Jn 14:15), Who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. (Ps 97:10 - [Spurgeon's Note](#))

FILL YOUR HEART WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you (in your heart, Ps 119:9, 11), with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (see note Colossians 3:16)

Comment: As we fill our hearts with God's Holy Word, and yield to His Holy Spirit, our lives will be like a refreshing fountain to ourselves and those we encounter.

MEDITATE IN YOUR HEART ON THE WORD OF GOD:

From Thy precepts I get understanding. Therefore (**Why?** because we've immersed ourselves in the Word of Truth and Life) I hate every false way. (Ps 119:104-[Spurgeon's note](#), cp Ps 1:1, 2, 3 -notes)

Therefore I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything (**Question:** Do you really hold God's precepts in high esteem? How much time have you spent in His highly esteemed words this morning before you went to work? this past week?), I hate every false way. (Ps 119:128-[Spurgeon's Note](#))

GUARD YOUR HEART IN AN ATTITUDE OF WATCHFUL PRAYER:

Keep watching (present imperative- literally keep staying awake, alert, on the lookout for potential danger or

hazards in the highway of holiness) and **praying** (present imperative -command to do this continually), that you may not enter into temptation (eg, the temptation to allow moral pollutants into your heart, that would pollute the "head waters" of our heart); the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mt 26:41)

John Piper writes...

I have often said that one of the reasons we feel so weak in our prayer lives is that we have tried to make a domestic intercom out of a wartime walkie talkie. Prayer is not designed as an intercom between us and God to serve the domestic comforts of the saints. It's designed as a walkie talkie for spiritual battlefields. It's the link between active soldiers and their command headquarters, with its unlimited fire-power and air cover and strategic wisdom. (From his sermon on Col 4:2-6 Walk in Wisdom Toward Those Outside)

What should we pray?

Mt 6:13 And **do not lead us into temptation** (into a test that which would become a temptation to sin or into a situation in which we would be tempted to commit sin, realizing that God Himself never tempts us to sin, Jas 1:13), but **deliver** us from evil (or "the Evil One", implying the snares of Satan).

Ps 141:4 Do not incline my **heart** to any evil thing, to practice deeds of wickedness with men who do iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies. (See [Spurgeon's note](#))

2Th 3:5 And may the Lord direct your **hearts** into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

Ps 119:37 **Turn away** (In the Septuagint, the Greek verb apostrepho means to cause to change from incorrect to correct behavior) my eyes from looking at **vanity** (Hebrew = shav = futility, worthlessness = that which has no result or use and thus is worthless. Sometimes shav describes an idol, with emphasis on that which is worthless. Shav is translated in Greek [Septuagint] by the word mataiotes = state of being without use or value and thus that which manifests emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness), and revive me in Thy ways.

Spurgeon Comments:

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. He had prayed about his heart, and one would have thought that the eyes would so surely have been influenced by the heart that there was no need to make them the objects of a special petition; but our author is resolved to make assurance doubly sure. If the eyes do not see, perhaps the heart may not desire: at any rate, one door of temptation is closed when we do not even look at the painted bauble. Sin first entered man's mind by the eye, and it is still a favourite gate for the incoming of Satan's allurements: hence the need of a double watch upon that portal. The prayer is not so much that the eyes may be shut as "turned away"; for we need to have them open, but directed to right objects. Perhaps we are now gazing upon folly, we need to have our eyes turned away; and if we are beholding heavenly things we shall be wise to beg that our eyes may be kept away from vanity. Why should we look on vanity? -- it melts away as a vapour. Why not look upon things eternal? Sin is vanity, unjust gain is vanity, self conceit is vanity, and, indeed, all that is not of God comes under the same head. From all this we must turn away. It is a proof of the sense of weakness felt by the Psalmist and of his entire dependence upon God that he even asks to have his eyes turned for him; he meant not to make himself passive, but he intended to set forth his own utter helplessness apart from the grace of God. For fear he should forget himself and gaze with a lingering longing upon forbidden objects, he entreats the Lord speedily to make him turn away his eyes, hurrying him off from so dangerous a parley with iniquity. If we are kept from looking on vanity we shall be preserved from loving iniquity.

Whatever is of vanity, make me to pass without seeing it. The sentiment is strikingly like that in our Lord's prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." Having prayed for what he wanted to see, the Psalmist here prays for the hiding of what he would not see.

And quicken thou me in thy way. Give me so much life that dead vanity may have no power over me. Enable me to travel so swiftly in the road to heaven that I may not stop

long enough within sight of vanity to be fascinated thereby. The prayer indicates our greatest need, -- more life in our obedience. It shows the preserving power of increased life to keep us from the evils which are around us, and it, also, tells us where that increased life must come from, namely, from the Lord alone. Vitality is the cure of vanity. When the heart is full of grace the eyes will be cleansed from impurity. On the other hand, if we would be full of life as to the things of God we must keep ourselves apart from sin and folly, or the eyes will soon captivate the mind, and, like Samson, who could slay his thousands, we may ourselves be overcome through the lusts which enter by the eye.

William Cowper on Psalm 119:37:

By the eyes oftentimes, as by windows, death enters into the heart; therefore to keep the heart in a good estate three things are requisite, First, careful study of the senses, specially of the eyes; for it is a righteous working of the Lord... that he who negligently uses the external eye of his body, should be punished with blindness in the internal eye of his mind. And for this cause Nazianzen, deploring the calamities of his soul, wished that a door might be set before his eyes and ears, to close them when they opened to anything that is not good... The second thing is, a subduing of the body by discipline (cp Titus 2:11, 12, 13-note). And the third is, continuance in prayer (Col 4:2-note, 1Th 5:17-note, Eph 6:18-note, Ro 12:12b-note).

Wolfgang Musculus (1563)

Notice that he does not say, I will turn away mine eyes; but, "Turn away mine eyes." This shows that it is not possible for us sufficiently to keep our by our own caution and diligence; but there must be divine keeping. For, first, where soever in this world you turn yourself, provocations to [commit sin] are met with. Secondly, with the unwary, and with far different persons, the eyes, the servants of a corrupt heart, wander after the things which are the vanities. Thirdly, before you are aware, the evil contracted through eyes creeps in to the inmost recesses of the heart, and [sows] the seeds of perdition (cp Mt 5:29, 30-note). This the Psalmist himself had experienced, not without greatest trouble both of heart and condition.

Albert Barnes makes a great (and pragmatic) point that...

An ugly object loses much of its deformity when we look often upon it. Sin follows this general law, and is to be avoided altogether, even in its contemplation, if we would be safe. A man should be thankful in this world that he has eyelids; and as he can close his eyes, so he should often do it.

Thomas Manton

Turn away, then quicken (revive). The first request is for the removing the impediments of obedience, the other for the addition of new degrees of grace. These two are fitly joined, for they have a natural influence upon one another. Unless we turn away our eyes from vanity, we shall soon contract deadness of heart. Nothing causes it so much as an inordinate liberty in carnal vanities. When our affections are alive to other things, they are dead to God. Therefore the less we let loose our heart to [focus on] these things, the more lively [revived] and cheerful are we in the work of obedience. On the other side, the more the rigour of grace is renewed, and the habits of it quickened into actual exercise, the more is sin mortified and subdued. Sin dieth, and our senses are restored to their proper use.

Joseph Caryl

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. That sin may be avoided we must avoid whatsoever leads to or occasions it. As this caused Job (Job 31:1) to covenant strongly with his eyes, so it caused David (**Ed**: The author of Ps 119 may be David but we cannot be dogmatic) to pray earnestly about his eyes. "Turn away mine eyes (or as the Hebrew may be rendered, make them to pass), from beholding vanity."

The eye is apt to make a stand, or fix itself, when we come in view of an ensnaring object; therefore it is our duty to hasten it away, or to pray that God would make it pass off from

it... He that fears burning must take heed of playing with fire: he that fears drowning must keep out of deep waters. He that fears the plague must not go into an infected house. Would they avoid sin who present themselves to the opportunities of it? (Of course not!)

John Morison

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. It is a most dangerous experiment for a child of God to place himself (or herself) within the sphere of seductive temptations. Every feeling of duty, every recollection of his own weakness, every remembrance of the failure of others, should induce him to hasten to the greatest possible distance from the scene of unnecessary conflict and danger.

William Kay

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. From gazing at the delusive mirages which tempt the pilgrim to leave the safe highway.

Charles Bridges

Is it asked -- "What will most effectually turn my eyes from vanity?" Not the seclusion of contemplative retirement -- not the relinquishment of our lawful connection with the world ["in the world, but not of the world"] -- but the transcendent beauty of Jesus unveiled to our eyes, and fixing our hearts (cp Heb 12:2, Ro 13:14 - put on Jesus).

William Seeker (1660)

Turn away mine eyes, etc. The fort royal of your souls is in danger of a surprise while the outworks of your senses are unguarded. Your eyes, which may be floodgates to pour out tears, should not be casements to let in lusts. A careless eye is an index to a graceless heart. Remember, the whole world died by a wound in the eye. The eyes of a Christian should be like sunflowers, which are opened to no blaze but that of the sun (Son).

Matthew Henry

For restraining grace that he might be prevented and kept back from that which would hinder him in the way of his duty: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." For constraining grace, that he might not only be kept from everything that would obstruct his progress heavenward, but that he might have that grace which was necessary to forward him in that progress: "Quicken (revive) thou me in thy way."

CHOOSE THE FEAR OF THE LORD:

The **fear of the LORD** is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth, I hate. (Pr 8:13, contrast Pr 1:29, 30, 31, 32, 33)

MAKE A DECISION OF YOUR WILL ABOUT WHAT YOU WATCH:

You need to make a conscious decision of what you are going to allow into your life. David gave us a practical example when he declared:

I will set no worthless (belial [\[01100\]](#) = good for nothing, also used as another name for Satan! cp use of the Hebrew transliteration by Paul in 2Co 6:15) thing before (Hebrew means directly in front of) my eyes. I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not fasten (dabaq [\[01692\]](#) = stick like glue, used in Ge 2:24 for man cleaving to his wife) its grip on me. (Ps 101:3)

Comment: What are those **worthless** things? Some are obvious such as R-rated movies, pornography, sensual novels, etc. But what about PG-13 rated movies? You be the judge but are the images and thoughts that are allowed entry into your heart edifying to you as a believer and God glorifying? What about most sitcoms on television today? It's almost impossible to find one that is not filled with sexual innuendo, curse words, off color jokes, etc. What do these things do to the heart? Will the "springs" be clean and unpolluted after exposure to such fare?

George Hakewill comments in regard to the phrase **it shall not fasten its grip on me...**

A bird may light upon a man's house; but he may choose whether she shall nestle or breed there, or not: and the devil or his instruments (the fallen world system) may represent a wicked object to a man's sight; but **he may choose** whether he will entertain

or embrace it or not. For a man to set wicked things before his eyes is nothing else but to sin of set purpose, to set himself to sin, or to sell himself to sin, as Ahab did, 1 Kings 21:1-29.

Albert Barnes warns us...

A wicked plan or purpose is thus represented as having a tendency to fasten itself on a man, or to "stick to him" -- as pitch, or wax, or a burr does.

Here are C H Spurgeon's comments on Ps 101:3

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I will neither delight in it, aim at it or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it (Pr 8:13, Ro 12:9), I will not gaze upon it with pleasure. The psalmist is very sweeping in his resolve, he declines the least, the most reputable, the most customary form of evil -- no wicked thing; not only shall it not dwell in his heart, but not even before his eyes, for what fascinates the eye is very apt to gain admission into the heart, even as Eve's apple first pleased her sight and then prevailed over her mind and hand.

I hate the work of them that turn aside He was warmly against it; he did not view it with indifference, but with utter scorn and abhorrence. Hatred of sin is a good sentinel for the door of virtue. There are persons in courts who walk in a very crooked way, leaving the high road of integrity; and these, by short cuts, and twists, and turns, are often supposed to accomplish work for their masters which simple honest hearts are not competent to undertake; but David would not employ such, he would pay no secret service money, he loathed the practices of men who deviate from righteousness. He was of the same mind as the dying statesman who said, "Corruption wins not more than honesty." It is greatly to be deplored that in after years he did not keep himself clear in this matter in every case, though, in the main he did; but what would he have been if he had not commenced with this resolve, but had followed the usual crooked Policy of Oriental princes? How much do we all need divine keeping! We are no more perfect than David, nay, we fall far short of him in many things; and, like him, we shall find need to write a psalm of penitence very soon after our psalm of good resolution.

It shall not cleave to me. I will disown their ways, I will not imitate their policy: like dirt it may fall upon me, but I will wash it off, and never rest till I am rid of it. Sin, like pitch, is very apt to stick. In the course of our family history crooked things will turn up, for we are all imperfect, and some of those around us are far from being what they should be; it must, therefore, be one great object of our care to disentangle ourselves, to keep clear of transgression, and of all that comes of it: this cannot be done unless the Lord both comes to us, and abides with us evermore.

MAKE NO PROVISION TO COMMIT SIN

But (for contrast see Ro 13:13-note) **put on** (aorist imperative = command to do this now!) the Lord Jesus Christ and **make no provision** (present imperative = a command which is coupled with a negative particle giving the sense of "stop making provision" implying they were already doing so) for the **flesh** (the fallen flesh) in regard to its **lusts** (strong desires in this case for evil ends). (see note Ro 13:14)

Comment: The order is critical. Jesus first. Say "Yes" to Jesus (and the Spirit of Christ) before you say "No" to the flesh! Then you will be motivated and empowered to carry out the command to make no provision (see same order and principle in Gal 5:16-note). Don't turn it around and say "I'll make no provision and that way I will clothe myself with Christ and be like Christ." You have just fallen into the trap of the flesh (fallen, sinful, evil flesh, not flesh and blood), which rises up when placed under "laws" or "restraints". Spend time at the foot of the Master, listening to His voice (Lk 10:39, 40, 41), speaking with Him, asking the Father to strengthen you with His Spirit in your inner man (Eph 3:16-note), etc - Then you will be forearmed and ready to carry out the task of not making provision for the strong desires to gratify self that emanate from your fallen flesh. Remember - Jesus first! Then you are clothed and armed for the battle that each new day brings! How is your quiet time lately beloved? I'm not trying to motivate you from a sense of legalism but from an heart attitude of love for your best Friend and Counselor. Spend a few moments with Him

each day before you head off to the office, to the school, to the taking the kids to school, etc. Then you are much more likely to go through the day as more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus our Lord.

TAKE "ANTI-GOD" THOUGHTS CAPTIVE USING DIVINELY POWERFUL WEAPONS

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the **weapons of our warfare** are not of the flesh, but **divinely powerful** for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking captive (present tense = continually, making this one's practice) every (Gk word means **all** without exception) thought to the obedience of Christ (See notes 2Cor 10:3-5)

Comment: We live in a fallen world and face 3 mortal enemies, the world, the devil and the flesh, and all three are sources of anti-God thoughts. Applying the truth of this passage, Paul is saying it is possible for believers to take captive these anti-God thoughts that come to corrupt and defile our heart. The better we know God's Word of Truth, the easier it is for us to recognize the lies, deception and "half-truths" with which we are assaulted on a daily basis. For example the writer of Hebrews says that...

solid food (cp 1Ti 4:6, Titus 1:9-note, 1Pe 2:2-note, Job 23:12-note, Je 15:16, Mt 4:4) is for the **mature**, who because of **practice** (speaks of that which is a habit) have their **senses trained to discern good and evil**. (Heb 5:14 - see note)

Oswald Chambers writes that taking **thoughts captive** ...

means the harnessing of impulse. We have the power in our hearts to fix the form of our choice either for good or for bad. (Chambers, O. Biblical Psychology. London: Simpkin Marshall)

A W Tozer wrote that...

What we think about when we are free to think about what we will—that is what we are or will soon become...

Anyone who wishes to check on his true spiritual condition may do so by noting what his voluntary thoughts have been over the last hours or days. What has he thought about when free to think of what he pleased? Toward what has his inner heart turned when it was free to turn where it would? When the bird of thought was let go did it fly out like the raven to settle upon floating carcasses or did it like the dove circle and return again to the ark of God? Such a test is easy to run, and if we are honest with ourselves we can discover not only what we are but what we are going to become. We'll soon be the sum of our voluntary thoughts...

The best way to control our thoughts is to offer the mind to God in complete surrender. The Holy Spirit will accept it and take control of it immediately. Then it will be relatively easy to think on spiritual things, especially if we train our thought by long periods of daily prayer. Long practice in the art of mental prayer (that is, talking to God inwardly as we work or travel) will help to form the habit of holy thought. (Born After Midnight)

><>><><>

As the needle of the compass has an affinity for the north magnetic pole, so the heart can keep true to its secret love though separated from it by miles and years. What that loved object is may be discovered by observing which direction our thoughts turn when they are released from the hard restraints of work or study. Of what do we think when we are free to think of what we will? What object gives us inward pleasure as we brood over it? Over what do we muse in our free moments? To what does our imagination return again and again?

When we have answered these questions honestly we will know what kind of persons we are; and when we have discovered what kind of persons we are we may deduce the kind of fruit we will bear. (The Root of the Righteous)

C H SPURGEON ADDS "THE PEACE OF GOD... SHALL GUARD YOUR HEART"

Spurgeon used this text in Philippians 4 to explain how one could fulfill the exhortation in Proverbs 4:23. (See full sermon [How to Keep the Heart](#)).

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:7-note)

Spurgeon comments on keeping our heart: Now, then, brother and sister, it is of the first importance that you keep your heart aright. You cannot keep your heart right but by one way. That one way is by getting, maintaining, and enjoying peace of God to your own conscience. I beseech you then, you that are professors of religion, do not let this night pass over your heads till you have a confident assurance that you are now the possessor of the peace of God. For let me tell you, if you go out to the world next Monday morning without first having peace with God in your own conscience, you will not be able to keep your heart during the week. If this night, ere you rest, you could say that with God as well as all the world you are at peace, you may go out tomorrow, and whatever your business, I am not afraid for you. You are more than a match for all the temptations to false doctrine, to false living, or to false speech that may meet you. For he that has peace with God is armed cap—a-pie; he is covered from head to foot in a panoply. The arrow may fly against it, but it cannot pierce it, for peace with God is a mail so strong that the broad sword of Satan itself may be broken in twain ere it can pierce the flesh. Oh! take care that you are at peace with God; for if you are not, you ride forth to tomorrow's fight unarmed, naked; and God help the man that is unarmed when he has to fight with hell and earth. (See full sermon [How to Keep the Heart](#)).

THE "SEQUENCE" & "PATHOLOGIC SEQUELAE" OF NOT GUARDING OUR HEART

The diagram illustrates the process of sensory input and its central processing. It is organized into three main vertical sections: **FROM WITHOUT** (left), **OUR SENSES...** (center), and **TAKE CAPTIVE** (right).

FROM WITHOUT (Left Column):

- World (1Jn 2:15, 16, 17)
- Devil (Ep 6:16-note)
- From within
- v
- Flesh (Jas 1:14,15-note)
- v

OUR SENSES... (Center Column):

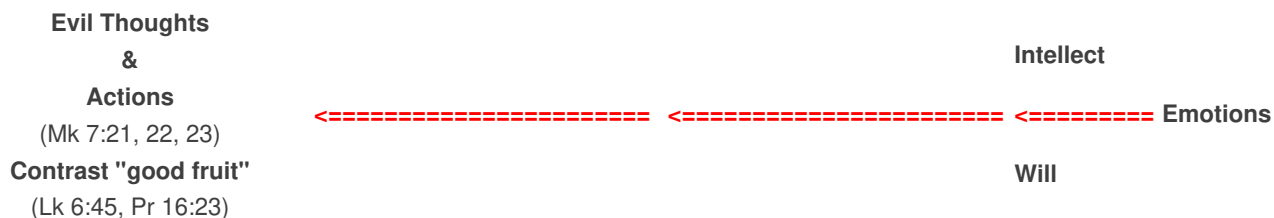
- OUR SENSES...
- EYES
- EARS
- TOUCH

TAKE CAPTIVE (Right Column):

- (2Co 10:3, 4, 5-note)
- v
- v
- v
- v
- v

Flow and Central Elements:

- A horizontal dashed arrow points from the left towards the center, labeled with **"Anti-God" Images** and **Ideas**.
- Another horizontal dashed arrow points from the center towards the right, labeled with **THOUGHTS** and **FEELINGS**.
- The word **HEART** is written in red at the end of the second arrow.
- At the bottom right, a vertical column of seven 'v' characters leads to the **"CONTROL CENTER"**.
- The word **"OUTPUT"** is written at the bottom center.



EXPLANATION OF CHART: This chart is an attempt to lay out schematically the importance of guarding one's heart. Notice, first, our 3 untiring, mortal enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, which tempt us with words and pictures, sights and sounds, continuously (cp 1Pe 2:11) bombarding us with these "anti-God" images and ideas that can potentially lead to anti-God thoughts and feelings (both of which can be deceiving). Our eyes and ears are both the portal of entry and our first line of defense against these intruders (Job 31:1, Ps 101:3, cp Ro 13:14, Ga 5:16,17). What comes in the eyes has the power to lead the heart astray (cp Job 31:7). Enabled by the Spirit and grace, we must continually choose to not allow anti-God input into our heart. The dictum "G.I.G.O." is apropos - "Garbage in, garbage out." (Mk 7:21, 22, 23, Mt 12:34, 34, 15:19, 20, Lk 6:45) If strongholds develop or thoughts get into our heart which are raised up against the knowledge of God, we have been granted the divine power (2Co 10:4, cp 2Pe 1:3, 4-note) and the divine charge to destroy them (strongholds) and take them captive (thoughts) (2Co 10:5-note), so that they do not contaminate our heart, the "control center" (intellect, emotions, will) of our inner man. On the other hand if we continually allow evil thoughts entry and refuse to destroy them or to take them captive, then the result will be evil thoughts, words and deeds coming out of our unguarded, contaminated heart. Thus we can see how critical it is that we discipline (train as one working out in a gym) ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:7, 8-notes), that we might continually guard our hearts, enabled and trained by God's all sufficient grace (cp Titus 2:11, 12-note; 1Co 15:10; 2Ti 2:1-note; 2Co 12:9) and His omnipotent Spirit (Ep 5:18-note; Gal 5:16-note; Ga 5:18-note; Ga 5:24-note; Ga 5:25-note; Ro 8:13-note).

What happens when we don't guard our heart and the head waters so to speak become polluted by moral filth, anger, unforgiveness, envy, greed, bitterness, etc? Jesus gives us the answer in His explanation of what truly defiles a person (cp Mk 7:15) declaring...

That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the **heart** of men, proceed the **evil** (Gk = kakos = denotes lack of something = bad, destructive, damaging, wicked) **thoughts** (Gk = dialogismos = reason with thoroughness and completeness, consider carefully!), **fornications** (Gk = porneia = sexual immoralities; refers primarily to sins of flesh, but these can never be divorced from sins in one's heart. Sin in one area always makes us more susceptible to sin in other areas! Eg, immorality in a marriage is almost always accompanied by deception/lying, etc) thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within (out of a polluted heart) and defile the man. (Mark 7:21, 22, 23, cp Mt 15:11, 18, 19, 20)

Comment: Observe the first defilement in Jesus' list -- **EVIL THOUGHTS** - WICKED "DESIGNS" - Why is this "pathologic" effect emphasized? Belief determines behavior. How one thinks or reasons will permeate, promote and permit the actions and attitudes. We behave the way we behave, because we believe the way we believe. Let us guard our hearts from the lies, "half truths", and deceptions that bombard us from our relentless enemies - THE WORLD, THE DEVIL, OUR FLESH.

As **Tozer** said "Every person is really what he or she secretly admires. If I can learn what you admire, I will know what you are, for people are what they think about when they are free to think about what they will."

In a parallel passage as **Jesus** condemned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, He declared...

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the **heart**. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. (Mt 12:34, 35)

If our heart is right with God, our lips and our feet will be what He wants them to be. On the other hand when our heart is defiled, **everything** is defiled. Have you had a spiritual checkup lately? You can remain healthy by keeping the Word of God in your heart (cp Ps 119:9, 10, 11). The Word of Truth and Life will spread to the other parts of your body. Do you glorify God with your mouth, feet and heart? What is in your heart will direct your life.

The **NET Bible** notes explain that the literal reads...

Heb “*more than all guarding.*” This idiom means “with all vigilance.” The construction uses the preposition *min* to express “above; beyond,” the word “all” and the noun “prison; guard; act of guarding.” The latter is the use here. ([NETBible Proverbs 4:23](#))

Jerry Bridges writes that...

Our minds are mental greenhouses where unlawful thoughts, once planted, are nurtured and watered before being transplanted into the real world of unlawful actions. People seldom fall suddenly into gluttony or immorality. These actions are savored in the mind long before they are enjoyed in reality. The thought life, then, is our first line of defense in the battle of self-control.

The gates to our thought lives are primarily our eyes and our ears. What we see or read or hear largely determines what we think. Memory, of course, also plays a big part in what we think, but our memories only store and feed back what originally comes into our minds through our eyes and ears. Guarding our hearts begins with guarding our eyes and ears. We must not allow that which panders to sexual lust, greed (called materialism in our present society), envy, and selfish ambition to enter our minds. We should avoid television programs, magazine or newspaper articles, advertisements, and conversations that arouse such thoughts. We should not only avoid them, but, to use Paul’s words to Timothy, “flee from all this.” (Bridges, J. [The Practice of Godliness](#) . Navpress)

A W Tozer spared no words in his warning for saints to guard their hearts...

What can be said about the books and magazines you read? What you read will shape you by slowly conditioning your mind. Little by little, even though you think you are resisting, you will take on the shape of the mind of the author of that book you are reading. You will begin to put your emphasis where he puts his. You will begin to put your values where she places hers. You will find yourself liking what he likes, thinking as she thinks.

The same is certainly true of the power of modern films. If you give yourself over to their influences, they will shape your mind and your morals.

What about the music you enjoy? It seems almost too late in these times to try to warn against what many in our society seem to revel in—the vile, vicious, obscene gutter language of so much popular music. It is not overstating the case to insist that the kinds of music you enjoy will demonstrate rather accurately what you are like inside. If you give yourself to the contemporary fare of music that touches the baser emotions, it will shape your mind, your emotions, your desires, whether you admit it or not.

You can drink poison if you want to, but I am still friend enough to warn you that if you do, you will be carried out in a box. I cannot stop you, but I can warn you. I have not the authority to tell you what you should listen to, but I have a divine commission to tell you that if you love and listen to the wrong kinds of music, your inner life will wither and die. (From Tragedy in the Church)

The Puritan writer **John Flavel** in his book "[Keeping the Heart \(online book\)](#)" writes that...

To keep the heart then, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual frame which fits it for a life of communion with God. This includes in it six particulars:

1) “frequent observation” of the state of the heart (self-examination, cp 2Cor 13:5)...

2) “deep humiliation for heart-evils and disorders” (cp Pr 28:13, 1Jn 1:9, Ps 34:18, Ps 51:1, 2, 3, 4, esp Ps 51:17, Is 57:15, 66:2, 2Ki 22:19, 20-Josiah, Ezek 9:4, Mt 5:3-note, Mt 5:4-note)...

3) “earnest supplications and instant prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace” (Mt 26:41)...

4) “imposing strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more earnestly with God and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin” (including for example vows, or Job’s “covenant with mine eyes”)...

5) “a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts...”

6) the “realizing of God’s presence with us and setting the Lord always before us” ...

([Click here for explanation of each of these six particulars in his chapter "What Is Keeping the Heart?"](#))

SINGLE HEART PURE HEART

Two songs for your heart

Take a moment to listen to this song, one of my favorites from Craig Smith, entitled [Single Heart](#)...

He had only one aim
In placing us here
This is His domain
And His message is clear.

Single heart, Single mind.
My eyes forward all the time.
Single heart, purified.
Undivided, unified.
Single heart, Single mind.

May You find in us,
Solitary trust
May you find a single heart!

Here is another song [Pure Heart](#) -- take a moment to ponder your life in light the words sung by Craig Smith and make it your prayer to the Father today:

Over and over I hear it again
That the Father desires pure heart
Not to seek earthly treasure or the favor of man
But to be found with pureness of heart

Chorus

Pure heart is what the Father desires
Holy heart purified by God's holy fire
Broken heart, proven to be faithful and true
Fashion in me a heart that's thirsting for You

Search ever chamber, expose them to me
Create motives of honor and simplicity
May you find faithfulness, integrity
A heart which is worthy for Your eyes to see

Chorus

My only ambition is to stand before You
And find I was pleasing in Your sight
An obedient child of God, faithful and true
Found with pureness of heart

Chorus

Phil Johnson (See [Wisdom Guards the Heart](#)) outlines several "bullet points" regarding how we are to **guard our heart** which are summarized (and paraphrased) as follows...

- (1) Surrender your heart to Christ, which clearly implies first we must be born again, a new creature in Christ (2Co 5:17). But even then, we are to present ourselves to God living sacrifices, doing so as an act of worship (Ro 12:1-note). If you lack a regenerate heart (Ezek 11:19, 20, 18:31, 36:26, 27), your heart is not worth guarding (cp Je 17:9).
- (2) Mortify or put to death evil thoughts (Col 3:5note, cp mortifying evil deeds in Ro 8:13-note), choking the life out of them and not then making provision for them again (Ro 13:14-note)
- (3) Put restraints on your heart that will keep you from entertaining iniquity in your thought life. Abstain from

every form of evil that seeks to pollute your mind. As Paul said to Timothy, "Discipline yourselves for godliness" (1Ti 4:7, 8-notes). Instead of getting your audiovisual input from the world, seek it in the Word, and especially in the Wisdom in the Word...

My son, **give attention** (command, in the Greek the present imperative calling for this to be our continual activity) to my words. **Incline** (again a command to do this continually) your ear to my sayings. 21 Do not let them depart from your sight. **Keep** (idea is to guard and this verb is again a command to do this continually) them in the midst (the center) of your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them, and health (and healing, including the idea of restoration, renewal or cure, cp same word in Mal 4:2) to all their whole body. (Pr 4:20, 21, 22)

Application: What do you watch or listen to when no one else is around?

(4) Guard your conscience - When the sage here encourages us to guard our hearts, he is, in effect, urging us to keep a healthy and active conscience. He's saying we should cultivate a mind and a conscience that are informed by the Word of God. In fact, I don't need to say much about this; it's self-evident. Don't let the voice of God's wisdom be silenced in your own heart by the hardening of your conscience.

(5) Guard your feet (Pr 4:26, 27) - Stay away from places where temptation assaults you.

(6) Exercise watchful, cautious self-control over your emotions. Don't let your emotions drive or control your mind, but vice versa. Emotions are good, but in their place, just like your arms are good, but they're not for walking. Your nose is good, but it's not very good for driving nails. In the same way, your emotions are good, but they're not for thinking. Scripture condemns the person who thinks with his emotions. Jas 3:14,15 refers to that kind of thinking as "sensual wisdom": wisdom driven by the senses, thinking that is driven by the emotions.

Richard Baxter said "Keep (Cast) out all inordinate passions (referring to emotions), for passions violently press the thoughts and forcibly carry them away. If anger or grief or pleasure be allowed in, they will command your thoughts."

As someone has written "Emotions are like screaming kids. Until you calm them down, you can't be heard. If you want to get rid of your bad thoughts, control your emotions." That's good advice.

(7) Control your thoughts. This is the whole point, and this is the area where the virtue of self-control is most important. This is the one area where your battle for self-control will be won or lost: your thought life. If you willingly and deliberately allow yourself to indulge in evil thoughts or wicked fantasies, what this verse says is you're filling the wellspring of your life with poison—and nothing is more self-destructive! "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." We're talking about spiritual warfare this morning. This is classic warfare issue, right? I mean, we've got this reservoir up here that feeds water to most of the San Fernando Valley... And you realize, don't you, that since the terrorist situation has become such a problem, that thing is guarded carefully, constantly! Because it's a great danger if anyone would poison that reservoir.

How Solomon would have profited by following his own advice! The writer of first Kings (1Ki 11) records the tragic example of Solomon's failure to guard his heart and should serve as a warning that should make us all shudder (!!!, cp 1Co 10:6, 11, 12)...

1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,

2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your **heart** away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love.

3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his **heart** away.

4 For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his **heart** away after other gods; and his **heart** was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the **heart** of David his father had been.

5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites.

6 And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done.

7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon.

8 Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

9 Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his **heart** was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,

10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded.

11 So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.

Heart (03820) (**leb** - note that this discussion also includes the closely related noun lebab 03824) sometimes refers to a literal heart (Ex 28:29, 1Sa 25:37, 2Ki 9:24), but most often is used figurative to refer to what I term the "control center" of our being. Think of an Air Traffic Controller and how dysfunctional, even destructive it is when the controllers fail to function as they should. (**Note - see notes above for additional discussion of the heart**).

Just as a healthy human heart is at the center of the body and absolutely essential for physical life and health, so too a healthy spiritual heart (intellect, emotion, will) is at the center of one's inner being (soul) and is vital for a healthy soul, serving as the "fountain" of all moral attitudes and actions. Our spiritual heart thus controls out **actions** and our actions determine our **habits**, which in turn determine our **character**. When God measures the "worth" of a man's life He puts the measuring tape around his heart, not around his head. Be a man after God's Own heart (Acts 13:22) We must continually "post a guard" at the doorway of our heart, so that every avenue for sin's entry is blocked.

John MacArthur - The "heart" commonly refers to the mind as the center of thinking and reason (Pr 3:3; 6:21; 7:3), but also includes the emotions (Pr 15:15, 30), the will (Pr 11:20; 14:14), and thus, the whole inner being (Pr 3:5). The heart is the depository of all wisdom and the source of whatever affects speech (Pr 4:24), sight (Pr 4:25), and conduct (Pr 4:26, 27). ([MacArthur, J.: The MacArthur Study Bible Nashville: Word](#))

John Kitto - All the phrases, more or less metaphorical, in which this word occurs, are rendered intelligible, without detailed examples, when we are told that the heart was, among the Hebrews, regarded poetically not only as the seat of the passions and emotions, as of love, pleasure, and grief, but also of the intellectual faculties—the mind, the understanding. In the original Scriptures, as well as in the English and other translations, the word 'heart' therefore, constantly occurs where 'mind' is to be understood, and would be used by a modern English writer. We say modern, because the ancient usage of the English word 'heart' was more conformable than the present to that of the Hebrews. ([Kitto's Popular Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature](#))

Richard Watson - The Hebrews regarded the heart as the source of wit, understanding, love, courage, grief, and pleasure... The heart is said to be dilated by joy, contracted by sadness, broken by sorrow, to grow fat, and be hardened by prosperity. The heart melts under discouragement, forsakes one under terror, is desolate in affliction, and fluctuating in doubt. To speak to any one's heart is to comfort him, to say pleasing and affecting things to him. The heart expresses also the middle part of any thing: "Tyre is in the heart of the seas," Ezekiel 27:4; in the midst of the seas. "We will not fear though the mountains be carried into the heart (middle) of the sea," Psalms 46:2 .The heart of man is naturally depraved and inclined to evil, Jeremiah 17:9 . A divine power is requisite for its renovation, John 3:1-11 . When thus renewed, the effects will be seen in the temper, conversation, and conduct at large. Hardness of heart is that state in which a sinner is inclined to, and actually goes on in, rebellion against God.

Bridgeway Bible Dictionary - Both Old and New Testaments speak repeatedly of the heart as the centre of a person's inner life. An examination of the hundreds of references to the heart in the Bible will show that the word is not limited in its meaning to one particular part of a person. '**Heart**' may refer to a person's whole inner life – what the person really is (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalms 22:26; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 22:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:4); or it may refer to attributes of human personality such as a person's understanding (1 Kings 3:9; Proverbs 2:10; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Ephesians 1:18), desires (Deuteronomy 24:15; Proverbs 6:25; Matthew 6:21; Romans 1:24), feelings (Judges 19:6; Proverbs 14:10; Proverbs 15:30; John 14:27; James 3:14), determination (Exodus 8:15; 1 Kings 8:58; Romans 6:17; Colossians 3:22), or character (1 Samuel 13:14; Jeremiah 5:23; Romans 2:29; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 3:4). **Sometimes 'heart'** is used as another word for a person's spirit (Psalms 51:10; Psalms 51:17; Ezekiel 36:26), soul (Deuteronomy 4:29; Proverbs 2:10; Acts 4:32) or mind (1 Samuel 2:35; Ephesians 1:18; Hebrews 8:10; cf. Matthew 22:37). The **heart** is what is sometimes referred to as 'the inner being', and is the source of all the wrong that a person does (Proverbs 6:14; Proverbs 6:18; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; Romans 1:24-25; Ephesians 4:18; see SIN). Therefore, the heart must be cleansed to bring forgiveness; or, to use another picture, it must be re-created to bring new spiritual life. Only God can bring about this cleansing or re-creation (Psalms 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26; Acts 8:21-22; Ephesians 3:16; Hebrews 10:22). Since the **heart** determines actions, a person must be careful to have right attitudes of heart at all times (Leviticus 19:17; Psalms 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:5;

James 3:14). God sees the inner condition and judges the person accordingly (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalms 44:21; Matthew 5:8; Revelation 2:23 ([Bridgeway Bible Dictionary](#)))

The **heart** is the source of whatever affects life and character (Mt 12:35; 15:19).

HEART - page 1262 in the [Dictionary of Biblical Imagery online](#) -

In antiquity very little was known about the heart, whose rhythmic beating coincided with all the functions of life and whose cessation meant death. The references in the Bible to the heart as a physical organ are few and by no means specific (e.g., 2 Kings 9:24), but the word heart is often used of such things as personality and the intellect, memory, emotions, desires and will.

Personality. The heart is used metaphorically to describe the intangibles that constitute what it means to be human. In this sense it is the antonym of the “flesh” or body. We see this in the psalmist’s confession, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps 73:26NIV).

To use a modern idiom, the heart is often used in the Bible to describe “what makes us tick,” that is, human personality. In other words, the heart is used to describe those dynamic forces that make us unique individuals. As such, the heart can be imbued with moral qualities. For instance, the poet in Psalm 131:1 claims that his “heart is not proud” (cf. 2Ch 32:26). Hearts can also be “evil” (1 Sam 17:28) or “deluded” (Is 44:20; cf. Jer 17:9).

In this regard we also find complex metaphors concerning the heart among the writers of the Bible. A heart not yet bound to God may be referred to as an “uncircumcised heart” (Deut 10:16; Jer 9:26; Rom 2:29; see CIRCUMCISION). On the other hand, hearts can be transformed from self-serving to God-fearing. Ezekiel describes the process as transforming hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (Ezek 11:19). In another place, the prophet refers to this transformation as the reception of a “new heart” (Ezek 18:31).

It is because the heart stands for human personality that God looks there rather than at our actions to see whether we are faithful or not. We are called upon to seek God with all our heart (Deut 4:29; 6:5), so that is where he looks to see if we are his people (1 Sam 16:7).

Our personality is a function of many different aspects of our being, including our thinking, remembering, feeling, desiring and willing. It is therefore not surprising that the Hebrew word for heart, *lëb*, is used as an image of these as well.

Intellect and Memory. We associate thought and memory with the brain today, but in the idiom of the Bible, thinking is a function of the heart. The psalmist thought about his present difficult situation in the light of his past. As he “remembered [his] songs in the night,” he says, “My heart mused and my spirit inquired” (Ps 77:6 NIV). As a prelude to the flood, the book of Genesis tells us that God noted “how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5 NIV).

When the Bible reports internal dialogue, whether silent prayer to God or simply thought, it uses the idiom “in the heart.” For instance, Hannah prayed to God “in her heart” (1 Sam 1:13); and throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher’s mental processes are reported as something he said “in his heart” (e.g. Eccles 2:1, 15). As Mary witnessed all the wonderful things that happened at the time of the birth of her child, Jesus, she is said to have “pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).

Emotions. According to biblical usage, the heart is the source from which the emotions flow. Aaron’s heart flows with joy when he sees Moses (Ex 4:14). Leviticus 19:17 warns God’s people not to hate their brother in their heart. Fear is expressed as a loss of heart (Deut 1:28), indicating that courage is also a heartfelt emotion (Ps 27:3). These and many other emotions—for instance, despair (Deut 28:65), sadness (Neh 2:2), trust (Ps 28:7) and anger (Ps 39:3)—are said to come from one’s heart.

The heart is the seat of desire as well. Ill-fated Shechem, son of Hamor the Canaanite, has his “heart set on Dinah” the daughter of Jacob (Gen 34:3, 8). Abner asks David if he can set things in motion for the king so David can “rule over all that your heart desires” (2 Sam 3:9). The psalmist tells his hearers to turn to God so he can give them the “desires” of their heart (Ps 37:4).

Will. The heart not only thinks and feels, remembers and desires, but it also chooses a course of action. Jesus himself taught that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Mt 15:19 NIV). The obstinacy of the human heart is also an act of will (Deut 2:20), and here we may mention the many references in the book of Exodus to the “hard heart” of Pharaoh (e.g., Ex 4:14, 21; 7:3; 8:15). This is a heart that refuses to choose in accordance with God’s will, which leads ultimately to the Egyptian king’s destruction.

On the positive side, the Bible talks of a heart that prompts a person to give a gift to the Lord (Ex 25:2). It speaks of the “integrity” of a person’s heart (1 Kings 9:4) and of a “discerning” heart (1 Kings 3:9).

God’s Heart. Perhaps the most striking use of heart in the Bible is in reference to God (Gen 6:6; 8:21). The usage is similar to that

applied to humankind and should be a reminder that we are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). God, after all, is a personal being who thinks, feels, desires and chooses.

One of the most intriguing passages in this connection is found in Hosea 11. The prophet quotes God as saying that, while he will indeed punish Israel for their rebellion, he will not completely destroy them. The decision to refrain from their utter destruction was not easy; it was the result of God's inner turmoil:

My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor devastate Ephraim again. (Hos 11:8–9NIV)

In the verse that follows, God justifies his change of mind on the basis of his divinity. Humankind, when angered, is naturally inclined toward a course of destruction of those who offend. But God is divine, not human, so his grace wins out.

See also BODY; HARD, HARDEN, HARDNESS; MIND; STONE.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Borrow [H. W. Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament](#) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

Related Resources:

- New Testament word study on Heart = **kardia**
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Hardening, Hardness of Heart Heart](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Heart](#)
- Fausset Bible Dictionary [Heart](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Heart](#) [Hardness of the Heart](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Heart](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Heart](#) [Slowness of Heart](#) [Hardening of Heart](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Heart](#)
- Kitto Biblical Cyclopaedia [Heart](#)
- The Jewish Encyclopedia [Heart](#)

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery writes that "In the Bible **heart** encompasses more than what we mean by mind (for which there is no word in biblical Hebrew). The heart is the center of the being, where the will, affections, thoughts, purposes and imagination reside. Human emotions are more frequently associated with the lower organs."

In the context of Proverbs 4, **watching over one's heart** involves guarding what is **said** (Pr 4:24, and the heart affects what is said, Mt 12:34), what is **seen** (Pr 4:25, Job 31:7, Mt 5:28), and what is **done** (Pr 4:26, 27).

Charles Wood writes that "In Hebrew the heart is the "kernel of the nut;" the internal citadel of the soul."

Oswald Chambers has an interesting thought on **heart** explaining that "The Bible term '**heart**' is best understood if we simply say "me," it is the central citadel of a man's personality. The heart is the altar of which the physical body is the outer court, and whatever is offered on the altar of the heart will tell ultimately through the extremities of the body. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Chambers, O. The moral foundation of life : A series of talks on the ethical principles of the Christian life. Hants UK: Marshall, Morgan & Scott)

Leb and its synonym **lebab** ([03824](#)) appear 860 times in the OT. The law, prophets, and Psalms often speak of the **heart**. **Heart** is used first of man in Ge 6:5. In Ge. 6:6 leb is used of God. "Heart" may refer to the organ of the body (Ex. 28:29, 2Sa 18:14; Ps. 38:10). **Leb** may also refer to the inner part or middle of a thing (Ex 15:8; Dt. 4:11; Pr. 23:34).

Lebab ([03824](#)) means heart, mind or the inner man, contrasted to the outer man (See Dt. 30:14; Joel 2:13; 1Sa 16:7). **Lebab** is often compounded with "**soul**" for emphasis, as in 2Chr 15:12 (cf. 2 Chr 15:15). **Baker** writes that lebab primarily "describes the entire disposition of the inner person that God can discern (1Sa 16:7); be devoted to the Lord (1Kgs 15:3); seek the Lord (2Chr 11:16); turn against people (Ex. 14:5); be uncircumcised (Lev. 26:41); be hardened (1 Sam. 6:6); be totally committed to the Lord (Deut. 6:5; 2 Chr. 15:15). It is also used to describe the place where the rational, thinking process occurs that allows a person to know God's blessings (Josh. 23:14); to plan for the future (1 Kgs. 8:18); to communicate (2 Chr. 9:1); and to understand God's message (Isa. 6:10). Like our English usage, it often refers to the seat of emotions, whether it refers to joy (Deut. 28:47); discouragement (Josh. 2:11); comfort (Judg. 19:8); grief (1 Sam. 1:8); sorrow (Ps. 13:2[3]); or gladness (Isa. 30:29). (Ibid)

Leb can be used of the man himself or his personality: (Ge 17:17 Eccl 1:16). Leb is also used of God in this sense (Jer. 3:15).

The seat of desire, inclination, or will can be indicated by heart (Ex. 7:14); (Ex. 35:5; 21, 29); (Ps. 86:12). Leb is also used of God in

this sense "with my whole heart and with my whole soul" (Jer. 32:41). Two people are said to be in agreement when their "hearts" are right with each other (2Ki10:15). In 2Chr 24:4 Joash "had in his heart".

The "**heart**" is regarded as the seat of emotions: (Deut. 6:5; Ex 4:14; 1Sa 2:1). So there are "merry" hearts (Jdg. 16:25), "fearful" hearts (Isa. 35:4), and hearts that "trembled" (1Sa 4:13).

The "**heart**" could be regarded as the seat of knowledge and wisdom and as a synonym of "mind." This meaning often occurs when "heart" appears with the verb "to know" (Dt. 8:5; 29:4). Solomon prayed, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart" (1Ki 3:9; 4:29). Memory is the activity of the "heart," as in Job 22:22.

The "**heart**" may be the seat of conscience and moral character. How does one respond to the revelation of God and of the world around him? (Job = Job 27:6, David = 2Sa 24:10).

The "**heart**" is the fountain of man's deeds (Ge 20:5-6). David walked "in uprightness of heart" (1Ki 3:6) and Hezekiah "with a perfect heart" (Isa 38:3) before God. Only the man with "clean hands, and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:4) can stand in God's presence.

Leb may refer to the seat of rebellion and pride (Ge 8:21; Tyre in Ezek. 28:2). They all become like Judah, whose "sin... engraved upon the tablet of their heart." (Jer. 17:1).

God controls the "heart." Because of his natural "heart," man's only hope is in the promise of God to receive a **newheart** (Ezek. 36:26 = New Covenant). So David the sinner prays "Create in me a clean heart (Ps. 51:10), "unite my heart [give me an undivided heart] to fear thy name" (Ps 86:11).

God tries the **heart** (1Chr 29:17). Hence God's people seek His approval: test "my heart" (Ps. 26:2).

The "**heart**" stands for the inner being of man, the man himself. As such, it is the fountain of all he does (Pr 4:4). All his thoughts, desires, words, and actions flow from deep within him. Yet a man cannot understand his own "heart" (Jer. 17:9). As a man goes on in his own way, his "heart" becomes harder and harder. But God will circumcise (cut away the uncleanness of) the "heart" of His people, so that they will love and obey Him with their whole being (Dt. 30:6).

Leb - 545v **NOTE FREQUENCY IN PSALMS & PROVERBS! (THIS WOULD MAKE AN INTERESTING STUDY OF THE "HEART")**

-

Gen 6:5f; 8:21; 17:17; 18:5; 24:45; 27:41; 34:3; 42:28; 50:21; Exod 4:14, 21; 7:3, 13f, 22f; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 21, 34f; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; 15:8; 25:2; 28:3, 29f; 31:6; 35:5, 10, 21f, 25f, 29, 34f; 36:1f, 8; Num 16:28; 24:13; 32:7, 9; Deut 4:11; 28:65; 29:4, 19; Josh 11:20; 14:8; Judg 5:9, 15f; 16:15, 17f, 25; 18:20; 19:3, 5f, 22; Ruth 2:13; 3:7; 1 Sam 1:13; 2:1; 4:13, 20; 6:6; 9:20; 10:9, 26; 17:32; 24:5; 25:25, 31, 36f; 27:1; 28:5; 2 Sam 6:16; 7:21, 27; 13:20, 28, 33; 14:1; 15:6, 13; 17:10; 18:3, 14; 19:7, 19; 24:10; 1 Kgs 3:9, 12; 4:29; 8:23, 47, 66; 9:3; 10:24; 11:3; 12:26f, 33; 18:37; 21:7; 2 Kgs 5:26; 6:11; 9:24; 12:4; 14:10; 23:3; 1 Chr 12:33, 38; 15:29; 16:10; 17:19; 28:9; 29:9; 2 Chr 6:14, 38; 7:10f, 16; 9:23; 12:14; 17:6; 24:4; 25:19; 26:16; 30:12, 22; 32:25f; Ezra 6:22; 7:27; Neh 2:2, 12; 4:6; 6:8; 7:5; Esther 1:10; 5:9; 6:6; 7:5; **JOB** - Job 1:8; 2:3; 7:17; 8:10; 11:13; 12:24; 15:12; 17:4; 23:16; 29:13; 31:7, 9, 27; 33:3; 34:14; 36:5, 13; 37:1, 24; 41:24;

PSALMS -

Ps 4:7; 7:9f; 9:1; 10:6, 11, 13, 17; 11:2; 12:2; 13:5; 14:1; 16:9; 17:3; 19:8, 14; 21:2; 22:14; 26:2; 27:3, 8, 14; 28:7; 31:12; 32:11; 33:11, 15, 21; 34:18; 35:25; 36:1, 10; 37:4, 15, 31; 38:8, 10; 39:3; 40:10, 12; 41:6; 44:18, 21; 45:1, 5; 46:2; 48:13; 49:3; 51:10, 17; 53:1; 55:4, 21; 57:7; 58:2; 61:2; 62:10; 64:6, 10; 66:18; 69:20; 74:8; 76:5; 78:8, 37; 81:12; 83:5; 84:2; 94:15; 97:11; 102:4; 105:3, 25; 107:12; 108:1; 109:22; 112:7f; 119:2, 10f, 32, 34, 36, 58, 69f, 80, 111f, 145, 161; 125:4; 131:1; 138:1; 140:2; 141:4; 143:4; 147:3;

PROVERBS -

Pr 2:2, 10; 3:1, 3, 5; 4:4, 23; 5:12; 6:14, 18, 21, 32; 7:3, 7, 10, 25; 8:5; 9:4, 16; 10:8, 13, 20f; 11:12, 20; 12:8, 11, 20, 23, 25; 13:12; 14:10, 13f, 30, 33; 15:7, 11, 13ff, 21, 28, 30, 32; 16:1, 5, 9, 21, 23; 17:3, 16, 18, 20, 22; 18:2, 12, 15; 19:3, 8, 21; 20:5, 9; 21:1f, 4; 22:11, 15, 17; 23:7, 12, 15, 17, 19, 26, 33f; 24:2, 12, 17, 30, 32; 25:3, 20; 26:23, 25; 27:9, 11, 19, 23; 28:14, 26; 30:19; 31:11;

Eccl 1:13, 16f; 2:1, 3, 10, 15, 20, 23; 3:11, 17f; 5:2, 20; 7:2ff, 7, 21, 25f; 8:5, 9, 11, 16; 9:1, 3, 7; 10:2f; 11:9f; Song 3:11; 5:2; 8:6; Isa 6:10; 15:5; 24:7; 29:13; 32:6; 33:18; 35:4; 38:3; 40:2; 42:25; 44:18ff; 46:8, 12; 47:7, 10; 51:7; 57:1, 11, 15, 17; 59:13; 61:1; 63:4, 17; 65:14, 17; 66:14; Jer 3:10, 15ff; 4:9, 14, 18f; 5:21, 23; 7:24, 31; 8:18; 9:14, 26; 11:8, 20; 12:3, 11; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 17:1, 5, 9f; 18:12; 19:5; 20:9, 12; 22:17; 23:9, 16f, 20, 26; 24:7; 30:21, 24; 31:21, 33; 32:35, 39, 41; 44:21; 48:29, 36, 41; 49:16, 22; Lam 1:20, 22; 2:18f; 3:21,

33, 65; 5:15, 17; Ezek 2:4; 3:7; 6:9; 11:19, 21; 13:2, 17; 14:3ff, 7; 18:31; 20:16; 21:7, 15; 22:14; 27:4, 25ff; 28:2, 6, 8, 17; 32:9; 33:31; 36:26; 40:4; 44:5, 7, 9; Dan 1:8; 10:12; Hos 2:14; 4:11; 7:6, 11, 14; 10:2; 11:8; 13:6, 8; Amos 2:16; Obad 1:3; Nah 2:10; Zeph 3:14; Zech 7:12; 10:7; 12:5; Mal 2:2; 4:6

Usage of Leab:

accord(1), attention(4), attention*(1), bravest*(1), brokenhearted*(3), care*(2), celebrating*(1), chests*(1), completely*(1), concern*(1), concerned*(1), conscience(1), consider*(2), considered*(2), courage(1), decided*(1), determine*(1), discouraged*(1), discouraging*(1), doing*(1), double heart(1), encouragingly*(1), **heart**(396), **heart's**(2), **hearts**(40), Himself(1), himself(6), imagination(1), inspiration(2), intelligence(1), kindly(5), life(1), merry-hearted*(1), middle(2), midst(1), mind(36), minds(3), myself(6), obstinate*(2), planned*(1), presume*(1), pride*(1), recalls*(1), reflected*(1), regard*(1), self-exaltation*(1), sense(10), senseless*(1), seriously(1), skill*(1), skilled*(1), skillful man*(1), skillful men*(1), skillful persons*(1), skillful*(3), spirits(1), stouthearted*(1), stubborn-minded*(1), tenderly(2), thought(3), understanding(7), undivided*(1), well(2), willingly*(1), wisdom(2), yourself(1), yourselves(1).

Lebab (03824) NOTE FREQUENCY IN DEUTERONOMY! - 228v -

Ge 20:5-6; Ex 14:5; Lev 19:17; 26:36, 41; Num 15:39; **DEUTERONOMY** - Deut 1:28; 2:30; 4:9, 29, 39; 5:29; 6:5-6; 7:17; 8:2, 5, 14, 17; 9:4-5; 10:12, 16; 11:13, 16, 18; 13:3; 15:7, 9-10; 17:17, 20; 18:21; 19:6; 20:3, 8; 26:16; 28:28, 47, 67; 29:18; 30:1-2, 6, 10, 14, 17; 32:46; Josh 2:11; 5:1; 7:5; 14:7; 22:5; 23:14; 24:23; Jdg 19:8-9; 1Sa 1:8; 2:35; 6:6; 7:3; 9:19; 12:20, 24; 13:14; 14:7; 16:7; 17:28; 21:12; 2Sa7:3; 19:14; 1Kgs 2:4, 44; 3:6; 8:17-18, 38-39, 48, 58, 61; 9:4; 10:2; 11:2, 4, 9; 14:8; 15:3, 14; 2Kgs 10:15, 30f; 20:3; 22:19; 23:25; 1Chr 12:17, 38; 17:2; 22:7, 19; 28:2, 9; 29:17-19; 2Chr 1:11; 6:7f, 30, 37; 9:1; 11:16; 13:7; 15:12, 15, 17; 16:9; 19:3, 9; 20:33; 22:9; 25:2; 29:10, 34; 30:19; 31:21; 32:6, 31; 34:27, 31; 36:13; Ezra 7:10; Neh 9:8; **JOB** Job 1:5; 9:4; 10:13; 12:3; 17:11; 22:22; 27:6; 34:10, 34; **PSALMS** - Ps 4:4; 13:2; 15:2; 20:4; 22:26; 24:4; 25:17; 28:3; 31:24; 62:8; 69:32; 73:1, 7, 13, 21, 26; 77:6; 78:18, 72; 84:5; 86:11-12; 90:12; 95:8, 10; 101:2, 4-5; 104:15; 109:16; 111:1; 119:7; 139:23; **PROVERBS** - Pr 4:21; 6:25; Eccl 9:3; **ISAIAH** - Isa 1:5; 6:10; 7:2, 4; 9:9; 10:7, 12; 13:7; 14:13; 19:1; 21:4; 30:29; 32:4; 47:8; 49:21; 60:5; **JEREMIAH** - Jer 4:4; 5:24; 13:22; 15:16; 29:13; 32:40; 51:46, 50; Lam 3:41; Ezek 3:10; 28:5f; 31:10; 36:5; 38:10; Daniel 8:25; 11:12, 25, 27-28; Hosea 7:2; Joel 2:12-13; Jonah 2:3; Nah 2:7; Zeph 1:12; 2:15; Hag 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18; Zech 7:10; 8:17.

NAS Usage of Lebab: anger(1), breasts(1), conscientious*(1), consider*(5), courage(1), desire(1), encouragingly*(1), fainthearted*(3), **heart**(185), **heart and the hearts**(1), **heart's**(1), **hearts**(27), **hearts like his heart**(1), intelligence(1), intended(2), mind(8), purpose(1), thought(1), timid*(1), understanding(2), wholehearted*(1), wholeheartedly*(1), yourself(1).

Adam Clarke writes ""Above all keeping," guard thy heart. He who knows any thing of himself, knows how apt his affections are to go astray.

Spurgeon writes that "Some of your hearts are not worth keeping. The sooner you get rid of them the better. They are hearts of stone. Do you feel today that you have a stony heart? Go home, and I pray the Lord hear my desire that your polluted heart may be removed. Cry unto God and say, "Take away my heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh;" (Ezek 11:19, 36:26) for a stony heart is an impure heart, a divided heart, an unpeaceful heart. It is a heart that is poor and poverty-stricken, a heart that is void of all goodness, and you can neither bless thyself nor others, if your heart be such. ([Proverbs 4:23 The Great Reservoir](#))

J Vernon McGee writes that...

the **heart** symbolizes the center of one's innermost being. The Lord Jesus said that it isn't what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of a man. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt 15:19). Some of the meanest things in the world come out of the human heart. The **heart** is the seat of the total personality. If you want to know how important the **heart** is, get your concordance and look up all the references to the heart that are in the Bible (Ed: see below for OT & NT Scriptures you can study!). We are to keep our hearts with all diligence. What we hear is important. What we study is important. What we see is important. We should recognize that out of that heart will come all of the great issues of our lives.

Let's not miss the fact that the Book of Proverbs, written long before Harvey made the discovery of the circulation of blood, makes a statement about the heart that centuries later science demonstrated to be true. In the Book of Proverbs (and this can be said of the entire Bible) you will find no unscientific or inaccurate observation.

Spurgeon wrote that...

Inasmuch as the heart is the most important part of man—for out of it are the issues of life—it would be natural to expect that Satan, when he intended to do mischief to manhood, would be sure to make his strongest and most perpetual attacks upon the heart. What we might have guessed in wisdom, is certainly true in experience; for although Satan will tempt and try us in every way, though every gate of the town of Mansoul may be battered, though, against every part of the walls thereof he will be sure to bring out his great guns, yet the place against which he levels his deadliest malice, and his most furious strength, is the heart. Into the heart, already of itself evil enough (Jer 17:9), he thrusts the seeds of every evil thing, and doth his utmost to make it a den of unclean birds, a garden of poisonous trees, a river flowing with destructive water. Hence, again, arises the second necessity that we should be doubly cautious in keeping the heart with all diligence; for if, on the one hand, it be the most important, and, on the other hand, Satan, knowing this, makes his most furious and determined attacks against it, then, with double force the exhortation comes, "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

Guthrie writes that...

He who would keep his heart pure and holy must plant a sentinel at every avenue by which sin may find access there, guarding against none more than the "little" sins, as they are called. The man of God has his eyes to keep, and so Job said, "I have made a covenant with mine eyes" (Job 31:1)—his tongue, and hence the exhortation, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile"—his ears, and hence the warning, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causes to err"—his feet, and hence David says, "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word." And since there is no gate of the five senses by which the enemy may not come in like a flood, unless the Spirit lift up a standard against him, we have need to guard every port, and write over every portal, "Here there entereth nothing to hurt or to defile." (Thoughts for the Quiet Hour)

Mark Water writes that we **watch over our hearts** in two ways

First, we guard our affections by mortifying our members (Colossians 3:5). The apostle is saying, "You are to prevent the working and deceit of sin, which is in your members." He also says, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"(3:2). Fixing and filling your affections with heavenly things will mortify sin.

What are the objects of such affections? They include God Himself, in His beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "altogether lovely... the chiefest of ten thousand" (Song of Solomon 5:10, 16); grace and glory; the mysteries of the gospel; and the blessings promised by the .)

Second, let us fix our affections on the cross of Christ. Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14). When someone sets his affections upon the cross and the love of Christ, he crucifies the world as a dead and undesirable thing. The baits of sin lose their attraction and disappear. Fill your affections with the cross of Christ and you will find no room for sin. The world put Him out of a house and into a stable, when He came to save us. Let Him now turn the world out-of-doors, when He comes to sanctify us.

Remember also that the vigor of our affections toward heavenly things is apt to decline unless it is constantly looked after, exercised, directed, and warned. God speaks often in Scripture of those who lost their first love, allowing their affections to decay. Let us be jealous over our hearts to prevent such backsliding. (Water, M. The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations. Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd)

The **Puritan John Flavel** has the following discussion on Proverbs 4:23 in his introductory chapter...

THE heart of man is his worst part before it is regenerated, and the best afterward; it is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions.

The eye of God is,
and the eye of the Christian ought to be,
principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion,
is to win the heart to God;
and the greatest difficulty after conversion,
is to keep the heart with God.

Here lies the very force and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the

gate of heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work are the scope of the text: wherein we have,

I. An exhortation, "Keep thy heart with all diligence."

II. The reason or motive enforcing it, "For out of it are the issues of life."

In the exhortation I shall consider,

First, The matter of the duty.

Secondly, The manner of performing it.

I. The matter of the duty: Keep thy heart. Heart is not here taken properly for the noble part of the body, which philosophers call "the first that lives and the last that dies ;" but by heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes represents some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Ro. 1:21, it is put for the understanding; their foolish heart, that is, their foolish understanding was darkened. Ps 119:11, it is put for the memory; "Thy word have I hid in my heart ;" and 1Jn 3:10, it is put for the conscience, which includes both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory; if our heart condemn us, that is, if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn.

But in the text we are to take it more generally, for the whole soul, or inner man. What the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigor of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

By keeping the heart, understand the diligent and constant use of all holy means to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God. [I say constant, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life, and makes it binding always. If the heart must be kept, because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.] Lavater on the text will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, beset by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch; and though the expression, **Keep thy heart**, seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or to make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts. We may as well be our own saviors as our own keepers; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, **Keep thy heart**, because the duty is ours, though the power is of God; what power we have depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ (Php 2:13). Grace within us is beholden to grace without us. "Without me ye can do nothing." (Jn 15:5)

So much for the matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it is with all diligence. The Hebrew is very emphatic; keep with all keeping, or, keep, keep, set double guards. This vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, how dangerous to neglect them!

The motive to this duty is very forcible and weighty: "For out of the heart are the issues of life." That is, the heart is the source of all vital operations; it is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these, comes from that; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute: "a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (Luke 6:45) So then, if the heart err in its work, these must miscarry in theirs; for heart errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterward; or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed. O then how important a duty is that which is contained in the following:

PROPOSITION.— The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is one great business of a Christian's life.

What the philosopher says of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; it is hard to keep them within any bounds, God has set limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty? This is that which affords the Christian matter of labor and watchfulness, to his dying day. It is not the cleaning of the hand that makes the Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart; this is the thing that

provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord. It was the fear of hypocrisy's invading the heart that made David cry, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed." It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out the prayer, "Unite my heart to fear thy name." (See [Keeping the Heart -- Chapter 1](#))

J W Miller explains that...

The Hebrew term **heart** is not simply a metaphor for feelings or emotions but also refers to the actual place in the body where thinking occurs and wisdom is born. How the heart was viewed at the time is spelled out in a lucid text from ancient Egypt, which describes how the heart is related to other bodily organs in performing its task:

The sight of the eyes, the hearing of the ears, and the smelling the air by the nose, they report to the heart. It is this [the heart] which causes every completed (concept) to come forth, and it is the tongue which announces what the heart thinks. ("The Theology of Memphis," Pritchard: 5)

In other words the heart receives factual knowledge from the surrounding world, reflects on it, and then, through speech, expresses the conclusions drawn. The heart is the bodily organ by means of which the raw data of experience is shaped into thoughts, concepts, or judgments.

The **thoughts of the heart** are vital to the health and vitality of the whole body. That too is why those who lack wisdom are spoken of in Proverbs (and in Egyptian literature) as lacking heart (Pr 7:7; NIV: judgment). They lack the capacity or willingness to think things through and come forth with realistic judgments or thoughts

In his Anthropology of the Old Testament, Hans Walther Wolff has shown that in most cases in the Bible where the term "heart" is used, "intellectual, rational functions" are ascribed to it, "precisely what we ascribe to the head and, more exactly, to the brain" (1Sa 25:37). For this reason it is no accident, Wolff continues, that the term heart "occurs by far the most frequently in the wisdom literature of the Bible—99 times in Proverbs alone, 42 times in Ecclesiastes, and in the strongly didactic Deuteronomy 51 times". That too is why the admonition to guard your heart above all else (4:23) may be thought of as one of the core challenges of the book of Proverbs. To guard your heart is "a fundamental precept, like Socrates' 'know thyself' " (R. Van Leeuwen, 1997:61). (Miller, J. W. Proverbs. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press) (Bolding added)

Cohen writes that in Solomon's day the heart was considered to be...

the central organ which conditions all man's activities and upon whose correct functioning depends the character of his living.

The **BKC** adds that in Pr 4:23...

the word **heart** means more than mental or emotional capacity; it also encompasses one's values (cf. Mt. 6:21-note).

Heart in Hebrew refers to one's emotions (Pr 12:25; 13:12; 14:10, 13) but more often to his intellect (such as understanding, Pr 10:8; discernment, Pr 15:14; reflection, Pr 15:28), or will (Pr 5:12). ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

Murphy observes that

The **heart** is the central organ of the body in the wisdom literature. It is often paraphrased as "**mind**," since it does have an intellectual component (cf. the usual, if unfortunate, translation of the "listening heart" of Solomon in 1Ki 3:9 as "understanding mind"). But it is also the basic orientation of a person, embracing desires, emotions, and attitude. The description of the deterioration of Solomon's "**heart**" in 1Ki 11:3, 4, 9 is more than a picture of mental lapse! If the teacher's words are in the heart, they are life and healing (Pr 4:21; cf. Pr 3:8). Hence the need to guard the **heart**, for it is the source of "the surges of life"—literally, "from it the goings out of life". The **heart** is imaged as a water source from which life erupts. Pr 4:24, 25, 26, 27 Appropriately in this passage the heart carries along several other organs of the body (cf. ear and eyes already in Pr 4:20, 21) mentioned frequently in wisdom instruction: mouth, lips, and eyes (parallel to "eyelids" or "orbs" in Pr 4:25), mouth, lips, and even the foot and hand. Such organs are affected by what is in the **heart**, for this gives the direction from which one is never to swerve, either right or left (Pr 4:27; cf. Dt 5:29). Two words for "eyes" appear in Pr 4:25, the second of which seems to mean the "eyelid" or "eyelash" probably related to the root,

"to fly," and hence indicating the fluttering eyelashes). The youth is to have "tunnel" vision, without any blinking, as described in Pr 17:24: the perceptive person looks straight ahead at wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth. The internalization of wisdom teaching (Pr 4:21) is matched by the internalization of evil in the heart of the wicked in Pr 6:14, 18. (Murphy, R. E. Vol. 22: Word Biblical Commentary: Proverbs. Word Biblical Commentary. 2002)

Charles Bridges writes that...

Invaluable are these rules as our safeguard. Assaulted as we are at every point, every inlet of sin must be strongly guarded - the **heart**... the citadel of man - the seat of his dearest treasure. It is fearful to think of its many watchful and subtle assailants. Let it be closely garrisoned. Let the sentinel be never sleeping on his post. "Take heed to thy way, and keep thy soul diligently." (Dt. 4:9.) But the heart must be known in order to be effectually kept. Nothing is more difficult, while nothing is more necessary. If we know not our hearts, we know nothing to any purpose. Whatever else we know, to neglect this knowledge is to be a fool at the best. If we know not our weak points, Satan knows them well--"the sins that most easily beset us." (cp Heb 12:1) Then when I know my heart, and feel it to be so dangerous, and in such dangers, the question forces itself upon me - 'Can I keep my heart?' Certainly not. But, though it be God's work, it is man's agency. Our efforts are His instrumentality. He implants an active principle, and sustains the unceasing exercise. (Phil 2:12, 13. Jude 1:24 with Jude 1:21) Conscious faith "commits the keeping of the heart to our faithful Creator." (1Pe 4:19. Ps 25:20.) This done-in His strength and guidance diligently improve all the means of preservation. Watch unto prayer. Cherish an humble dependent spirit. Live in the atmosphere of the word of God. Resist the admittance of an evil world, even in its most plausible forms. (Example of Gideon's refusal to rule over - Jdg 8:22, 23. Example of the prophet Elisha's refusal of taking anything from the pagan king for doing the Lord's work - 2Ki 5:5, 16) Here lies the conflict to the end. 'The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and after conversion to keep it with him.' 'What is there'- asks Mede-'that will not entice and allure so fickle a thing as the heart from God?'

Above all keeping - exhorts the wise man - keep thine heart. Here Satan keeps -here therefore must we keep-special watch. If the citadel be taken, the whole town must surrender. If the heart be seized, the whole man-the affections, desires, motives, pursuits-all will be yielded up. The heart is the vital part of the body. A wound here is instant death. Thus spiritually as well as naturally, out of the heart are the issues of life. It is the great vital spring of the soul, the fountain of actions, the centre and the seat of principle, both of sin and of holiness. (Mt 12:34, 35.) The natural heart is a fountain of poison. (Mt 15:19) The purified heart is "a well of living water." (Jn, 4:14.) As is the fountain, so must be the streams. As is the heart, so must be the mouth, the eyes, the feet. Therefore, above all keeping, keep thine heart. Guard the fountain, lest the waters be poisoned. (Cp. Ge 26:18, 19, 20, 21) Many have been the bitter moments, from the neglect of this guard. All keeping is vain, if the heart be not kept. But with this keeping, let us not forget to guard the outlets of sin! (Pr 13:3, Pr 4:24) What a world of evil does 'the heart, pour out from the froward mouth! (Jas 3:5, 6) Commit, therefore, both heart and mouth to Divine discipline. (Ps 19:13; 141:3, 4.) Then let prayer and faith be the practical principles of Christian watchfulness. Not only shun, but put away-yea-far from thee-the perverse lips. Their evil--be it remembered--extends beyond ourselves. Even should the peace-speaking blood speak peace to ourselves, still will remain the painful sense of injury to our fellow-creatures, perhaps without remedy. (Bridges, C. Commentary on Proverbs)

Thomas Constable explains that the Hebrew concept of...

Heart (Pr 4:23) usually means "**mind**" (Pr 3:3; Pr 6:32a ["sense" = Hebrew leb = "heart"]; Pr 7:7b [again, "sense" = "heart"]; et al.), but it has a much broader meaning that includes the **emotions** (Pr 15:15, 30), the **will** (Pr 11:20; 14:14), and even the **whole inner person** (Pr 3:5). Here the **affections** are particularly in view. With verses Pr 4:20, 21, 22, verse 23 helps us see that the life in view is not some prize that one gains all at once. It is rather a growing spiritual vitality that enervates the wise person and enables him or her to reach out and help others effectively (cf. Mark 7:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23; Luke 6:45; John 4:14 and especially John 7:38). (Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible)

Harry Ironside comments on Solomon's figurative use of **heart** noting that...

Here is displayed a scientific knowledge and accuracy far beyond the times in which Solomon wrote. The great discovery of Harvey, the circulation of the blood, which revolutionized medical thought, is here calmly taken for granted, and used to set forth, or illustrate, a spiritual truth. Just as the heart is the centre of the physical system, whence flow the issues of life, so, in a moral and spiritual sense, the heart, used as a synonym for the

soul, is that which must be jealously guarded, that thence may go forth that which is for the upbuilding of the child of God. (Ironsides, H. A. Notes on the Book of Proverbs. 1908)

The IVP Bible Background Commentary (OT) notes that...

It is a common tradition in the ancient Near East for the heart to be the seat of the intellect (see Pr 14:33) and the source of stability for one who would adhere to a just and wise life (see Solomon's request in 1Kings 3:5, 6, 7, 8, 9). (Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press)

Conrad Mbewe has an article entitled **Pastoral Purity** in which he addresses guarding our hearts...

The first responsibility in this single-eyed pursuit of godliness is the guarding of the heart. The wise man spoke well when he said, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The minister's heart is the heart of his ministry. Be sure of this: Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Keeping the eye and heart and spirit and conscience pure is the future of a man's ministry. So, beware of sins of the heart—pride, envy, jealousy, lust, greed, anger, and sloth. No wonder that history has dubbed them "the seven deadly sins"! Long before a person makes visible shipwreck of his life and ministry, his heart has been allowed to be a citadel of sin. I say again, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

This is the greatest battle you will ever wage in your life and ministry. We may all keep away from physical adultery and actual theft. But how many people have reduced their ministries into ego-centric showrooms that have absolutely nothing to do with the glory of God? How many men's once robust ministries have shriveled because they were envious of other men's ministries? How many good men have been driven by jealousy into riding a hobbyhorse of what the Chinese call "killing a fly on the forehead of a friend using a hatchet"? What about that wandering eye that fails to see a member of the opposite sex without thinking of the bedroom? How many men are presently laboring outside God's will, all because of seeking a more lucrative ministry? The list is endless. Brethren, these are the sins that kill the spirituality and power of our ministries long before any overt sins are visible to our people. There is no doubt that to keep your ministry alive and kicking year after year, you must train yourself to be godly. (The Founder's Journal, 2002).

Davis Huckabee writes that in this verse Solomon..

recognizes what is our greatest need, and gives command to strictly guard that which is the motive center and power plant of all our doings. This reminds us of Matthew 15:16. To leave the heart unguarded is to surrender the whole citadel of the soul. "As the heart is the center of motion to the circulation of the blood, which is the (animal) life (Lv 17:11, 14), so spiritually, as the seat of the desires and affections, it is designed to be the center and fountain of the heavenly life," [Faussett]. Sin has so corrupted the heart, however, that it cannot perform its ordained function until it has been cleansed and changed in the new birth.

Peter Marshall former chaplain of the US Senate tells the following story "The Keeper of the Spring" which illustrates the importance of constantly guarding our heart...

An elderly, quiet forest dweller once lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. Many years ago, the town council had hired this old gentleman as Keeper of the Spring to maintain the purity of the pools of water in the mountain crevices. The overflow from these pools ran down the mountainside and fed the lovely spring that flowed through the town. With faithful, silent regularity, the Keeper of the Spring patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches from the pools, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water.

By and by, the village became a popular attraction for vacationers. Graceful swans floated along the crystal-clear spring, the mill wheels of various businesses located near the water turned day and night, farmlands were naturally irrigated, and the view from restaurants sparkled.

Years passed. One evening the town council met for its semiannual meeting. As the council members reviewed the budget, one man's eye caught the salary paid the obscure Keeper of the Spring. "Who is this old man?" he asked indignantly. "Why do we keep paying him year after year? No one ever sees him. For all we know, this man does us no good. He isn't necessary any longer!" By a unanimous vote, the council dispensed with the old man's services.

For several weeks nothing changed. But by early autumn, the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One afternoon, someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint to the water in the spring. A few days later, the water had

darkened even more. Within a week, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks, and a foul odor emanated from the spring. The mill wheels moved slowly; some finally ground to a halt. Businesses that were located near the water closed. The swans migrated to fresher waters far away, and tourists no longer visited the town. Eventually, the clammy fingers of disease and sickness reached deeply into the village.

The shortsighted town council had enjoyed the beauty of the spring but underestimated the importance of guarding its source. We can make the same mistake in our lives. Like the Keeper of the Spring who maintained the purity of the water, you and I are the Keepers of Our Hearts. We need to consistently evaluate the purity of our hearts in prayer, asking God to reveal the little things that contaminate us. As God reveals our wrong attitudes, longings, and desires, we must remove them from our hearts. (from Joshua Harris' book [I Kissed Dating Goodbye](#). Multnomah Publishers)

A W Pink has an entire chapter entitled [Heart Work \(click for entire chapter\)](#), writing that keeping of the heart with all diligence...

is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the least diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. As long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

The man is what his heart is. If this be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If this be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Pr 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man's heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore,

"Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thine heart, than to the defending of thine house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money" (Peter Moffat, 1570).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for Out of it are the issues of life" (Pr 4:23). The "heart" is here put for our whole inner being, the "hidden man of the heart" (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To "keep"—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: **the enablement is His, but the duty is ours**. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say,

"The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life."

Now to **"keep"** the heart right implies that it has been set right. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan's control to God's, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To keep the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it and daily strives to hold it.

"Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory" (John Owen in Causes of Apostasy).

Here is Pink's summary of what it means to keep the heart. The reader is advised to read the extended discussion that goes with each point by [clicking here](#).

1. To "keep" the heart means striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God...

2. To "keep" the heart means striving to bring it into conformity with the Word...

3. To "keep" the heart means to preserve it tender unto sin...

4. To "keep" the heart means to look diligently after its cleansing.

SELF-WATCH! by F B Meyer

"Keep thy heart above all that thou guardest:
For out of it are the issues of life."--Pr. 4:23

SAID PETER to our Lord, "Spare Thyself this death of which Thou speakest--this bitter suffering and anguish shall never be Thine!"

These words are continually spoken still, and many are the voices that bid us spare ourselves--the voices of our friends who love us; the voices of prudence and worldly wisdom; the voices of our own wayward hearts.

Do not spare your judgment of yourself. Never permit yourself to do things which you would be the first to condemn in others. Never suppose that there are reasons for you to do a wrong, which, under no circumstances would you tolerate in your neighbour.

Do not spare yourself in confessing your sins and mistakes. Confession is one of the tests of nobility. Not a few are willing to confess to God, who never attempt to confess to men. It is a serious question whether that sorrow for sin is genuine and deep enough which does not lead the offender to ask his fellow-man for pardon, even as he asks his God. Nothing could be clearer than Christ's words, that whenever we remember that our brother has aught against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar, and go first to seek reconciliation with him, before we offer our sacrifice to God.

The supreme test of goodness is not in the greater but in the smaller incidents of our character and practice; not what we are when standing in the searchlight of public scrutiny, but when we reach the firelight flicker of our homes; not what we are when some clarion-call rings through the air, summoning us to fight for life and liberty, but our attitude when we are called to sentry-duty in the grey morning, when the watch-fire is burning low. It is impossible to be our best at the supreme moment if character is corroded and eaten into by dally inconsistency, unfaithfulness, and besetting sin.

You cannot really help people without expending yourself. The only work that tells must cost you something. Gold, silver, and precious stones can never be built into the new Jerusalem unless you are willing to part with them from the stores of your own life.

PRAYER - Most loving Father, may love fill and rule my heart. For then there will spring up and be cherished between Thee and me a likeness of character, and union of will, so that I may choose and refuse what Thou dost. AMEN. (F. B. Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

F B Meyer - THE FORTRESS OF THE HEART

"Keep thy heart with all diligence."--Pr. 4:23.
"The peace of God shall keep your hearts."--Phil. 4:7.

IN MOST of the old castles there is an inner keep, which is protected, not only by mighty walls and bastions, but by the portcullis at the gate, and sentries at every approach, who challenged every one that passed in and out. So the heart is continually approached by good and evil, by the frivolities and vanities of the world and the insidious suggestions of the flesh. It is like an inn or hostelry, with constant arrivals and departures. Passengers throng in and out, some of them with evil intent, hoping to find conspirators, or to light fires that will spread until the whole being is swept with passion, consuming in an hour the fabric of years to ashes.

We need, therefore, to be constantly on the watch; we must keep our heart above all else that we guard, for out of it are the issues of life (R.V. marg.). Our Lord says that "out of the heart of man come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts," etc. The devil and the world without would be less to be feared, if there were not such strong tendencies to evil within--many of them inherited from long lines of ancestors, who, alas! pass down to us the worst features of their characters equally with the best.

Keep it Clean. Just as the eye of the body is perpetually washed with tear-water, so let us ask that the precious blood of Christ may cleanse away any speck of impurity. Remember how delicate a thing the heart is, and how susceptible to the dust of an evil thought, which would instantly prevent it becoming the organ of spiritual vision. Sursum Corda! Lift up your hearts! We lift them up unto the Lord!

The Sentinel of Peace. Then the Peace of God will become the warden or sentry of the heart, and it passeth

understanding! We can understand the apparent peace of some men. They have made money, and their gold-bags are piled around them as a fortress; they have rich and influential friends, within whose protection they imagine they will be sheltered and defended; they enjoy good health, and are held in high esteem. We can understand such peace, though it often proves ephemeral! But there is a peace that passeth understanding! It is to this that our Lord refers when He says, "My Peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

PRAYER - Keep me, Heavenly Father, as the apple of Thine eye; defend me by Thine Almighty power; hide me from this strife of tongues and the fiery darts of the wicked one. May my heart be as the palace which the Stronger than the strong man keeps in perfect peace. AMEN. (F. B. Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

In his book [Back to Bethel \(= plain text version\)](#), (Download [PDF Version](#)) **F B Meyer** writes in his chapter entitled "**The Rule of Our Thoughts**"...

I have explained that you might expect to be tempted to the end of your life, that the nearer you live to God, the more you will be tempted. The presence of temptation in your life is not a proof of deterioration, but the contrary, for the more you know of God on the one hand the more you will know of Satan's temptation, on the other hand.

If you desire to be kept from yielding to temptation, you must be very careful of your thoughts, and it is about the necessity of guarding your thoughts that I am going to speak now.

KEEP THY HEART CLEAN

First, let us look at Pr 4:23, where the wise man says: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," or as the revised version puts it: "Keep thy heart above all things that thou keepest."

You keep your wealth, you keep your home, you keep your health, you keep your character, but above all these things keep your heart. Why? Because out of it are the issues of life.

When **Bunyan** depicted the character of Ignorance, he made him say:

"I think my heart is as good as anybody's heart, and as for my thoughts, I take no notice of them."

He shows at once that he does not know himself, and that he is exposed to every temptation that crosses his path. If you have never before noticed your thoughts you will find before I am done that the first suggestion of wrong comes through the doorway of the mind.

Turn again to Pr 23:7, and read: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The thoughts lay down the tram lines upon which presently the tram car makes its way. Just as the tram car will pass up and down the rails in a great city, so does the act follow along the track of the thought.

I know there are men who say, "I must not do that act, but I may indulge the thought of doing it." There are those who dare not act impurely, but during the hours of darkness they allow their thoughts to wander where they will, and such men and women think they have escaped wrong; but let them understand that those thoughts are all noted by God, and they will have to account for them at the day of judgment. Let them also know that the thoughts they have entertained in their hearts will find an issue, and there will be some act in their life, perhaps ten years hence, as a result of these unholy thoughts. Sometimes it seems rather terrible that a life should be blasted by one act, and you may be disposed to pity the man and say that it is hard for him to be judged and crippled for the rest of his life by the passionate act of a single moment. But remember that an act is never alone. It really sums up trains of unholy thought in which the man has been indulging, and therefore you do not judge him for the one act, but for the process of which it is the result. The tree was eaten through before it crashed to the ground in the storm. (See "Tiny Evils, Big Fall")

THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN - The Word of God tells us, in Gen. 6:5: "God saw that the wickedness of man was very great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Away back in the days of Noah the trouble God had with man was in his thoughts; The whole trend of the Bible is to get our thinking right.

As a contrast to that verse in Genesis, I quote Phil 4:8: "Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, think on these things."

Up to the doorway of your heart are always coming hundreds and thousands of thoughts, and you must be careful to reject the evil

ones and let into your soul only those that are of good report. If these are the tenants of the inner life, you need have no fear about your character. I am prepared to say that if you think right, you need not take much care about your life.

Butler in his Analogy says there are three steps in the formation of character--act, habit, character. The act makes the habit, the habit or the bundle of habits form the character. Thackeray amplified this saying thus: "Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap character; sow character, reap destiny."

I illustrated this not long ago to an audience of children by showing a thread, and attached to it a piece of twine, then a rope, then a chain, and padlock. I tied the thread around a boy, and he broke it easily. But I gradually wound the twine and rope and chain about him to show the power of habit. The thread was the thought leading to the act, the rope was the habit, the chain was character, ending in the padlock of destiny.

Our Lord announces the same truth in Mark 7:21: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts." Then He names some of the sins--adultery, fornication, murder, thefts, covetousness. They all begin in the evil thoughts. In Ep 2:3 we are told: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." The Greek says "the desires of the flesh and the thoughts." I want you to notice that, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the thoughts." Desire is not in itself wrong. The affections and propensities of our nature are not wrong in themselves. God gave these to us to pull along the chariots of our lives. He put within us all manner of appetites and propensities which are His own beautiful gifts. The wrong comes in two ways: if we desire too much of the right thing, and if we desire gratification in a wrong way. Whenever desire oversteps the bounds, or seeks gratification in a wrong way, it becomes lust.

You cannot help the bad thoughts coming. As one of the Puritans said: "You cannot help the birds flying over your head, but you can keep them from building their nests in your hair." Some are part of us by heredity. Then the papers and books we read, the pictures which are exhibited in store windows and in art galleries, the conversations we overhear,--all around us there are many things exciting and appealing to us, and we are having unholy desires constantly presented to our mind. But we must not fulfill them. We may have the temptations to lust presented to us, but there is a vast difference between that and having the lust gratified. The evil thought may come to your door and knock, and you may keep your door locked. You sin when you open your heart and let the thought in and gloat over it. Then desire becomes lust.

In James 1:14, 15 we read: "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed. For when the lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Let me illustrate by the use of botany. You know that flowers have their sex, and the bees gathering honey in one flower carry the pollen to another, and the result is flower and fruit. Precisely in the same way the heart of man is always open, and bees of all kinds seem to bring the pollen of unholy thoughts; when these are sown in the desires of our nature, there is at once the result of which St. James speaks. As soon as you allow the evil thought to mingle with your nature, it bringeth forth the act of sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

I am not speaking now of the sinful state which we have inherited from Adam, but of the act of sin. Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth this child of sin, and its grandchild, which is death. There you have the parent, child and grandchild.

Now we may say that bad thoughts fly about like microbes. Our system of surgery has been entirely transformed in Great Britain by the recent discovery of the influence of microbes. We are now taught that the air is filled with microbes. The surgeons always keep their instruments in a solution of carbolic acid, so that when an instrument makes an incision in the flesh it will not carry microbes with it. This is to prevent suppuration, which is only the multiplication of microbes in an open wound.

What microbes are to the body, bad thoughts are to the soul. As you have to use antiseptics to check microbes, so you must live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, who is the antiseptic to bad thoughts. These thoughts come from Satan. "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices," (2Co 2:11). The Greek is, "We are not ignorant of his thoughts." Satan is always starting evil thoughts.

To use a simile that anybody can understand, the soul is like a castle with a great gateway. Many people leave the gateway of their soul open, so that every vagrant, truant evil thought may come pouring in and do as it likes. At the gateway of your soul there are many thoughts apparently innocent, but really great traitors. If you keep your gateway unguarded, unsentinelled, these thoughts pour in and out, backwards and forwards, and presently blow up your whole soul with passion.

Therefore, in dealing with our thoughts, two things are necessary: First, discernment; and second, keeping power.

We read in Is 28:5,6: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate." The Lord of hosts shall be two things: first, a spirit of judgment, and secondly, strength. Are not these what we need? (For the rest of this chapter see - [Back to Bethel by F B Meyer = plain text version](#) or download the [PDF Version](#) ([Alternative Site](#)))

Today in the Word

When Harry Truman became president, House speaker Sam Rayburn took him aside and said, 'From here on out you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't.' Rayburn wasn't trying to insult Truman. He was simply warning the new president to be on his guard. The Bible tells us to do the same thing. We need to guard our hearts because the heart is the seat of our affections, and therefore of our decisions.

This truth is one more nugget in the gold mine of godly wisdom from the Proverbs. Our goal this month is to learn more about how God wants us to live and to capitalize on the resources He has provided to help us discover the path of life. Proverbs 4 contains much wisdom for us.

Today's reading presents two very clear alternatives two paths that lead to very different ends. God is eager to lead us along a path that is straight, well-marked by His wisdom, and illuminated by His love.

When we walk along this path, with God's instruction Book in our hands (Pr 4:13), we don't need to worry about stumbling. God is not in the business of putting obstacles in our way.

In contrast, 'the path of the wicked' (Pr 4:14) is a sharp turn in the road. Instead of being straight and well-lit, it is twisted and dark, littered with the stones and potholes of sin.

Solomon could not have been any more plain. If we live according to the standards of God's Word, we will end up in 'the full light of day' (v. 18). But sin produces only darkness and eventual gloom. And no one will be able to say that God did not make the two choices clear.

So how do we make sure we stay on the right path? Pr 4:20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 give us all the instruction we need. Solomon tells us to keep a guard on what goes into our hearts and what comes out of our mouths.

At the same time, we need to keep our eyes straight ahead, fixed on Jesus (Heb 12:2note), so that we can see where we're going. Anyone can follow a well-marked path by paying attention to the signs.

We used to sing a children's chorus that begins, 'O be careful little eyes what you see.' The song goes on to urge that we guard what our ears hear, what our hands do, and where our feet go. That's a pretty good spiritual checklist! We suggest you follow the song's biblical advice today and do a head-to-foot checkup on your Christian life.

It has become commonplace in the last several years to acknowledge that proper diet and adequate exercise are crucial elements of preventing heart disease. In fact, a University of Pennsylvania study found that exercise worked like certain prescription drugs in preventing heart disease. In our culture, however, this welcome emphasis on physically healthy hearts isn't combined with concern for spiritually healthy hearts. So consider today's passage an ad for Spiritual Heart Check America!

We begin with the oft-repeated exhortation to pay attention to the father's words, to listen and focus on them. In short, if we're looking at God's words, we won't be focusing on others' words. We see once again the importance of treasuring up God's Word, because His words bring forth life and health. It's been noticed that people who are angry or unforgiving often experience increased physical ailments. Verse 23 emphasizes this: the condition of our heart is to be protected at all costs.

Jesus taught the same thing. When the Pharisees accused His disciples of being unclean, Jesus replied, "What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean' " (Matt. 15:11). Thus today's passages encourages us to monitor what we take in, not allowing an unfiltered stream to enter our hearts through TV, movies, magazines, and other media.

Speech often indicates the true condition of our heart. It's embarrassing to "slip" and to say something hurtful unintentionally, but this often reveals our true feelings. That's why it's good to be reminded that the condition of our hearts determines our words and actions. If we're embittered toward others, we will find it nearly impossible to serve them and to look for their best. But if we have been cultivating edifying thoughts about others, we're much more predisposed to love them through service and prayer.

Matthew Henry wrote

We must keep a watchful eye and a strict hand upon all the motions of our inward man, Pr 4:23. Here is,

1. A great duty required by the laws of wisdom, and in order to our getting and preserving wisdom:

Keep thy heart with all diligence. God, who gave us these souls, gave us a strict charge with them: Man, woman, keep thy heart; take heed to thy spirit, Dt 4:9. We must maintain a holy jealousy of ourselves, and set a strict guard, accordingly, upon all the avenues of the soul; keep our hearts from doing hurt and getting hurt, from being defiled by sin and disturbed by trouble; keep them as our jewel, as our vineyard; keep a conscience void of offence; keep out bad thoughts; keep up good thoughts; keep the affections upon right objects and in due bounds. Keep them with all keepings (so the word is); there are many ways of keeping things—by care, by strength, by calling in help, and we must use them all in keeping our hearts; and all little enough, so deceitful are they, Jer. 17:9. Or above all keepings; we must keep our hearts with more care and diligence than we keep any thing else. We must keep our eyes (Job 31:1), keep our tongues (Ps. 34:13), keep our feet (Eccl. 5:1), but, above all, keep our hearts.

2. A good reason given for this care, because out of it are the **issues of life**.

Out of a heart well kept will flow living issues, good products, to the glory of God and the edification of others. Or, in general, all the actions of the life flow from the heart, and therefore keeping that is making the tree good and healing the springs. **Our lives will be regular or irregular, comfortable or uncomfortable, according as our hearts are kept or neglected.**

HEART IN THE BIBLE

OT References on the Hebrew noun leb = heart - Gen. 6:5, 6; 8:21; 17:17; 18:5; 24:45; 27:41; 34:3; 42:28; 50:21; Ex 4:14, 21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22, 23; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 21, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; 15:8; 25:2; 28:3, 29, 30; 31:6; 35:5, 10, 21, 22, 25, 26, 29, 34, 35; 36:1, 2, 8; Nu 16:28; 24:13; 32:7, 9; Deut. 4:11; 28:65; 29:4, 19; Jos. 11:20; 14:8; Jdg. 5:9, 15, 16; 16:15, 17, 18, 25; 18:20; 19:3, 5, 6, 22; Ruth 2:13; 3:7;

1Sa 1:13; 2:1; 4:13, 20; 6:6; 9:20; 10:9, 26; 17:32; 24:5; 25:25, 31, 36, 37; 27:1; 28:5; 2 Sam. 6:16; 7:21, 27; 13:20, 28, 33; 14:1; 15:6, 13; 17:10; 18:3, 14; 19:7, 19; 24:10; 1 Ki. 3:9, 12; 4:29; 8:23, 47, 66; 9:3; 10:24; 11:3; 12:26, 27, 33; 18:37; 21:7; 2 Ki. 5:26; 6:11; 9:24; 12:4; 14:10; 23:3; 1 Chr. 12:33, 38; 15:29; 16:10; 17:19; 28:9; 29:9; 2 Chr. 6:14, 38; 7:10, 11, 16; 9:23; 12:14; 17:6; 24:4; 25:19; 26:16; 30:12, 22; 32:25, 26;

Ezra 6:22; 7:27; Neh. 2:2, 12; 4:6; 6:8; 7:5; Esther 1:10; 5:9; 6:6; 7:5;

Job 1:8; 2:3; 7:17; 8:10; 11:13; 12:24; 15:12; 17:4; 23:16; 29:13; 31:7, 9, 27; 33:3; 34:14; 36:5, 13; 37:1, 24; 41:24;

Ps. 4:7; 7:9, 10; 9:1; 10:6, 11, 13, 17; 11:2; 12:2; 13:5; 14:1; 16:9; 17:3; 19:8, 14; 21:2; 22:14; 26:2; 27:3, 8, 14; 28:7; 31:12; 32:11; 33:11, 15, 21; 34:18; 35:25; 36:1, 10; 37:4, 15, 31; 38:8, 10; 39:3; 40:10, 12; 41:6; 44:18, 21; 45:1, 5; 46:2; 48:13; 49:3; 51:10, 17; 53:1; 55:4, 21; 57:7; 58:2; 61:2; 62:10; 64:6, 10; 66:18; 69:20; 74:8; 76:5; 78:8, 37; 81:12; 83:5; 84:2; 94:15; 97:11; 102:4; 105:3, 25; 107:12; 108:1; 109:22; 112:7, 8; 119:2, 10, 11, 32, 34, 36, 58, 69, 70, 80, 111, 112, 145, 161; 125:4; 131:1; 138:1; 140:2; 141:4; 143:4; 147:3;

Pr 2:2, 10; 3:1, 3, 5; 4:4, 23; 5:12; 6:14, 18, 21, 32; 7:3, 7, 10, 25; 8:5; 9:4, 16; 10:8, 13, 20, 21; 11:12, 20; 12:8, 11, 20, 23, 25; 13:12; 14:10, 13, 14, 30, 33; 15:7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 21, 28, 30, 32; 16:1, 5, 9, 21, 23; 17:3, 16, 18, 20, 22; 18:2, 12, 15; 19:3, 8, 21; 20:5, 9; 21:1, 2, 4; 22:11, 15, 17; 23:7, 12, 15, 17, 19, 26, 33, 34; 24:2, 12, 17, 30, 32; 25:3, 20; 26:23, 25; 27:9, 11, 19, 23; 28:14, 26; 30:19; 31:11; Eccl. 1:13, 16, 17; 2:1, 3, 10, 15, 20, 23; 3:11, 17, 18; 5:2, 20; 7:2, 3, 4, 7, 21, 25, 26; 8:5, 9, 11, 16; 9:1, 3, 7; 10:2, 3; 11:9, 10;

Song 3:11; 5:2; 8:6

Isa 6:10; 15:5; 24:7; 29:13; 32:6; 33:18; 35:4; 38:3; 40:2; 42:25; 44:18, 19, 20; 46:8, 12; 47:7, 10; 51:7; 57:1, 11, 15, 17; 59:13; 61:1; 63:4, 17; 65:14, 17; 66:14;

Jer 3:10, 15, 16, 17; 4:9, 14, 18, 19; 5:21, 23; 7:24, 31; 8:18; 9:14, 26; 11:8, 20; 12:3, 11; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 17:1, 5, 9, 10; 18:12; 19:5; 20:9, 12; 22:17; 23:9, 16, 17, 20, 26; 24:7; 30:21, 24; 31:21, 33; 32:35, 39, 41; 44:21; 48:29, 36, 41; 49:16, 22; La 1:20, 22; 2:18, 19; 3:21, 33, 65; 5:15, 17;

Ezek. 2:4; 3:7; 6:9; 11:19, 21; 13:2, 17; 14:3, 4, 5, 7; 18:31; 20:16; 21:7, 15; 22:14; 27:4, 25, 26, 27; 28:2, 6, 8, 17; 32:9; 33:31;

36:26; 40:4; 44:5, 7, 9;

Dan. 1:8; 10:12; Hos. 2:14; 4:11; 7:6, 11, 14; 10:2; 11:8; 13:6, 8; Amos 2:16; Obad. 1:3; Nah. 2:10; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 7:12; 10:7; 12:5; Mal. 2:2; 4:6

NT References on Greek noun kardia = heart - Matt. 5:8, 28; 6:21; 9:4; 11:29; 12:34, 40; 13:15, 19; 15:8, 18, 19; 18:35; 22:37; 24:48; Mk. 2:6, 8; 3:5; 6:52; 7:6, 19, 21; 8:17; 11:23; 12:30, 33; Lk. 1:17, 51, 66; 2:19, 35, 51; 3:15; 5:22; 6:45; 8:12, 15; 9:47; 10:27; 12:34, 45; 16:15; 21:14, 34; 24:25, 32, 38; Jn. 12:40; 13:2; 14:1, 27; 16:6, 22; Acts 2:26, 37, 46; 4:32; 5:3, 4; 7:23, 39, 51, 54; 8:21, 22, 37; 11:23; 13:22; 14:17; 15:9; 16:14; 21:13; 28:27; Ro 1:21, 24; 2:5, 15, 29; 5:5; 6:17; 8:27; 9:2; 10:1, 6, 8, 9, 10; 16:18; 1 Co. 2:9; 4:5; 7:37; 14:25; 2 Co. 1:22; 2:4; 3:2, 3, 15; 4:6; 5:12; 6:11; 7:3; 8:16; 9:7; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:18; 3:17; 4:18; 5:19; 6:5, 22; Phil. 1:7; 4:7; Col. 2:2; 3:15, 16, 22; 4:8; 1 Thess. 2:4, 17; 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:5; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 3:8, 10, 12, 15; 4:7, 12; 8:10; 10:16, 22; 13:9; Jas. 1:26; 3:14; 4:8; 5:5, 8; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:4, 15; 2 Pet. 1:19; 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:19, 20, 21; Rev. 2:23; 17:17; 18:7

Ray Pritchard...

There's an old gospel song that says,

**How about your heart, is it right with God?
That's the thing that counts today.**

So how about your heart? Many of us are concerned about heart disease—and rightly so— but what about spiritual heart disease that is just as insidious? During a heated battle one of Napoleon's soldiers was shot just above a heart. In those days surgery was done without anesthesia. While the doctor was removing the bullet, the soldier declared, "One inch lower you will find the emperor." **What would we find if we opened your heart today? Would we find Jesus Christ enshrined in your heart?** ([The Blessings of Obedience - sermon by Dr. Ray Pritchard - June 1997](#))

What starts in the **heart** ends up on the lips ("rotten speech" Ep 4:29-note, "rotten attitudes" Ep 4:31-note). What begins with bitterness ends with slander. We think, we feel, and then we speak. What starts as a grievance becomes an outburst of wrath that hardens into anger that expresses itself in clamor and ultimately as slander. Malice marks such a person through and through. And it all starts with personal hurt that becomes bitterness. Stop it at the first and you won't have to stop it at the last. That's why Proverbs 4:23 reminds us to "guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." We are doing Satan's work when we climb that staircase. Every step is a step for him. ([Do Not Grieve the Spirit - sermon by Dr. Ray Pritchard - June 2005](#))

Healthcare for the Heart - If you're over 40 years old, your heart has already beat more than 1.5 billion times. I know that when my heart stops, it will be too late to change my ways. So I've been trying to control my weight, get exercise, and watch not only what I eat but also what's eating me.

This last point relates to another vital organ called "the heart"—our spiritual heart. It too has throbbed millions of times with thoughts, affections, and choices. In the heart we determine how we will speak, behave, and respond to life's circumstances (Proverbs 4:23). Will we trust the Lord and choose to be gracious, patient, and loving? Or will we yield to pride, greed, and bitterness?

Today's Scripture reading emphasizes the importance of caring for our heart. Are we keeping spiritually fit?

Weight: Do we need to lose the weight of unnecessary burdens and cares?

Pulse: Are we maintaining a steady rhythm of gratitude and praise?

Blood pressure: Is our trust greater than our anxiety?

Diet: Are we enjoying the life-giving nutrients of the Word of God?

Have you checked your heart lately? — Mart De Haan

O Lord, You see what's in the heart—
There's nothing hid from You;
So help us live the kind of life
That's filled with love for You. —D. De Haan

To keep spiritually fit, consult the Great Physician.

Spiritual Heart Care - You're up at the crack of dawn, doing your exercises. You're not going to let your heart get weak! You've trimmed the fat from your diet. You get regular cholesterol checks. And you're exercising four times a week to keep your cardiovascular system in peak condition.

But you've let your spiritual heart turn to mush. Preoccupied with the temporary, you've neglected the eternal. You seldom read the Bible anymore. Your prayers are lists of requests to God to make your life more comfortable and pain-free. By the time you reach the church door after the sermon, you can't recall what the pastor said because you were thinking about something else.

If this describes you, it's time to get into a spiritual heart-care program. It begins where David (a man after God's own heart Acts 13:22, 1Sa 13:44, 16:7) was in Psalm 139--by acknowledging that God knows all about your heart. It continues in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." And it results in the prayer of Psalm 19:14, "Let ... the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord."

Taking care of your body makes sense, but it makes even more sense to gain spiritual fitness by walking with the Lord. That's an exercise program with eternal value! — David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Dear Jesus, take my heart and hand,
And grant me this, I pray:
That I through Your sweet love may grow
More like You day by day. --Garrison

**To keep spiritually fit,
keep walking with the Lord.**

The Secret Garden - The Secret Garden, a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, tells the story of Mary, a young girl who goes to live with her wealthy uncle Archibald on his estate in England. Mary gets to know Dickon, a working-class boy who loves nature. The two children discover a fenced-in garden that Mary's uncle has locked up because it reminds him of his deceased wife. The garden looks dead because of neglect, but Dickon assures Mary that, with proper tending, it will recover with new life. With the children's help, "the secret garden" eventually bursts forth with colorful, fragrant blooms.

All of us have a secret garden of the heart. How we tend it will determine what speech and behavior it produces. Proverbs wisely admonishes us: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Pr 4:23). The word keep means "to watch or guard with fidelity." Guarding what we take into our hearts and monitoring our response will determine what takes root there. As we remove the thorns of resentment, weeds of lust, and roots of bitterness, we can replace them with the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-note, Gal 5:23-note). ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Are you tending the garden of your heart? — Dennis Fisher

Think not alone of outward form;
Its beauty will depart;
But cultivate the Spirit's fruits
That grow within the heart. —D. De Haan

God wants you to water the seed He's planted in your heart.

The Cost Of Neglect - I read about a Detroit man who couldn't find his house. He had gone to the right address but all he found was an empty lot. Completely baffled, he asked the Detroit Free Press to help him figure out what was going on. A newspaper reporter learned that not only was the house gone, but the deed to the empty lot was in someone else's name.

What had happened? For one thing, a few years had passed since the homeowner had left the city without providing a forwarding address. In addition, he had failed to make arrangements for someone to keep the property in repair. So the house was torn down because a city ordinance called for the removal of neighborhood eyesores.

The homeowner's neglect illustrates the practical truth of Proverbs 24:30-34. Neglect leads to loss. This principle also applies to our

daily walk with God. If we neglect our times of prayer and fellowship with the Lord, our relationship with Him will deteriorate and we will no longer experience His favor. We would never want that to happen, but we allow it when we become preoccupied with anything that comes between us and Christ.

We need to establish priorities that honor God. Then we'll avoid the loss that comes from neglect. — Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Unless we're occupied with Jesus
And seek to do His will each day,
We're sure to know the loss and sorrow
That comes when we neglect His way. —Anon.

If you shirk today's tasks, you increase tomorrow's burdens.

Hostile Heart - Beware the hostile heart. That's the warning of Dr. Redford Williams from Duke University's Behavioral Medicine Research Center. He has been saying for years that having a hostile personality can kill us--most often by heart disease but also by injuries and accidents. Anger speeds the heart rate, raises blood pressure, and disrupts the coronary arteries.

Some indicators of a hostile heart are impatience with delays, mistrust of co-workers, annoyance with the habits of family members or friends, and a persistent need to have the last word in arguments or to get even when wronged.

In Proverbs 4, a wise father urged his son to listen closely to his words. He said, "They are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Pr 4:22, 23).

Our wise heavenly Father issues the same call to us about His life-giving words recorded for us in the Bible. The transformation of a hostile heart begins as we listen to God, meditate on His Word, and allow Him to alter our behavior and speech. It's a prescription I need to follow today. How about you? — David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

I want my heart to be in tune with God,
In every stage of life may it ring true;
I want my thoughts and words to honor Him,
To lift Him up in everything I do. --Hess

**Let God's Word fill your mind,
rule your heart, and guide your tongue.**
Colossians 3:16+ paired with Ephesians 5:18+

WITH ALL DILIGENCE:

- Pr 4:7; 3:21; 11:16; 13:3; Eccl 5:13

John MacArthur - If we took care of our spiritual hearts the way we take care of our physical hearts, it would be amazing, wouldn't it? People are going crazy over protecting their hearts. There are joggers everywhere. People riding bicycles. Up and down hills. Got to take care of that heart! (MacArthur, J. The Only Way to Happiness : The Beatitudes. Chicago: Moody Press. 1998)

Speaker's Bible Commentary (1873) says that **with all diligence** is "Above all keeping (i.e., with more vigilance than men use over aught else). Keep thy heart. The words that follow carry on the same similitude. The fountains and wells of the East were watched over with special care. A stone was rolled to the mouth of the well, so that "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Song 4:12KJV), became the type of all that is most jealously guarded. So it is here. The heart is such a fountain, out of it flow the "issues" of life. Shall we let those streams be tainted at the fountain-head?

All ([03605](#)) (**kol**) means the whole of something.

Diligence ([04929](#)) (**mismaat**) literally means a guarding as in the state of confining a prisoner (eg, Neh 4:9, 22). The basic idea of the root verb (shamar) is to exercise great care over.

Darby's translation remains fairly true to the original meaning of this Hebrew word - Keep thy heart more than anything that is guarded (mismat)

The **ESV** and **NET** use the word **vigilance** in place of **diligence**. More literally this reads "**above all guarding**" and thus several other translations attempt to convey this idea with the phrase "**above all else**" or "**more than anything**".

Solomon's point is that the guarding of one's heart will not be an easy task. Neither is it to be a passive letting go and letting God, but instead it calls for persistent effort and perseverance. The implication is that this guarding will entail a struggle. Why? Because our old nature (which remains even in those who have been born again) still indwells our mortal bodies and manifests "heart trouble" (cp Je 17:9, Ge 8:21, Eccl 9:3), despite the fact that we have been given a new heart (2Co 5:17, Ezek 11:19, 20, 18:31, 36:26, 27).

Wiersbe observes that "Diligent hands are directed by a diligent heart, and this means the discipline of the inner person. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life" (Pr 4:23, NKJV). When we cultivate the inner person through prayer (**Ed**: cp Mt 26:41), meditation on the Word (**Ed**: Ps 1:1, 2, 3 -notes; Josh 1:8-note; see **Biblical Meditation**), and submission to the Lord (**Ed**: Jn 14:21), then we can experience the joys of a disciplined and diligent life. "The fruit of the Spirit is... self-control" (Gal 5:22, 23-notes). (Wiersbe, W. W. Be Skillful. An Old Testament Study. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books)

If we would "keep" our hearts "with all diligence", we wouldn't be careless, for example, about what gets into our hearts through the "eye-gate". We'd "censor" our own television viewing out of a greater concern to "watch" our own heart. And we'd even be willing to get rid of our television if it's affecting us negatively. We would rid our homes of any visual images or literature that incline us toward sexual immorality or sin of any kind.

We'd not only guard what might come in; but also what might come out. We would keep our own attitudes in check, so that the words that come out of our mouths aren't reflective of evil in our heart. We'll be like David, when he prayed (Psalm 141:3).

John Angell James (1853) in his chapter entitled "**The Means of Christian Progress**" wrote that...

Great attention to self-cultivation, spiritually considered, is a means of growth. By this I mean what is expressed in one or two passages of Scripture; such, for instance, as the exhortation, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Pr. 4:23. It is the heart, the great vital spring of the soul—the fountain of actions—the center of principle—the seat of motives; the heart, where are the thoughts and feelings out of which conduct comes. It is this that must be the first, chief, constant object of solicitude to the Christian. It is this which God sees—and as God sees it, and because God principally looks at it—that must be ever uppermost in our concern. To keep the heart must mean exerting ourselves with great earnestness, in dependence upon Divine grace, to preserve it in a good state; laboring to preserve its vitality, vigor, and purity. We must often ask the question, "In what state is my heart? Are my thoughts and affections in a good spiritual condition?"

The heart is, in another view of it, the citadel of the soul—if this be neglected, the enemy at the gates will soon be in and take possession. Set a watch, therefore, upon the heart. Let the sentinel be never off duty, nor sleeping at his post. Keep out evil thoughts, and unholy affections, and vile imaginations. Without great vigilance they will elude observation. As soon as an enemy of this kind is detected, he must be seized and made captive, until every thought is brought into subjection to Christ. As the state of the heart is, so is the man in reality, and before God. Discipline the heart then. (John Angell James. Christian Progress)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote that...

The heart really does control everything; and the 'heart' here (Pr 4:23) means the centre of the personality, not merely the seat of the emotions. Put that right and everything else will be right. Our Lord stated the matter negatively when He said that it is not that which goes into a man which pollutes the man but rather that which comes out of him. It is 'out of the heart that come evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders', and all such things (Mark 7:20, 21, 22, 23). In other words, in the last analysis it is not the temptations that meet us on the streets that determine our conduct; it is the heart of the man who faces them.

Two men may face the same conditions; one falls, the other stands.

The difference is not in the temptation but in the heart of the man.

'Out of the heart ...!' So we must pay attention to the heart. (Lloyd-Jones, D. M. The Unsearchable Riches of Christ -- studies in Ephesians, chapter 3. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House)

The new birth creates a new appetite and requires a new diet.

O child of God, guard well your eyes

From anything that stains the heart;
Forsake those things that soil the mind--
Your Father wants you set apart. --Fasick

FOR FROM IT FLOW THE SPRINGS OF LIFE

- Mt 12:35, 15:18,19

**What you do with your heart
determines what you do with your life**
--Warren Wiersbe

For - Here the conjunction introduces the explanation or reason for the importance of guarding our hearts.

From it - From our heart (mind, will, emotion), our "master control". Solomon's point is that what occupies our minds and determines what and how we think, will work its way out in how we behave and what we say and do (see the schematic above notes). What is in the heart eventually comes out in the life.

Solomon has a similar thought in Ecclesiastes 10...

A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left. (Eccl 10:1)

Jesus emphasized the importance of diligently guarding the heart for it is intimately related to our behavior (in thought, word, deed - good or bad) declaring that...

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the **heart**. The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. (Mt 12:34, 35)

The upright (honorable, intrinsically good) man out of the good treasure [stored] in his **heart** produces what is upright (honorable and intrinsically good), and the evil man out of the evil storehouse brings forth that which is depraved (wicked and intrinsically evil); for out of the abundance (overflow) of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45) (Amplified)

A good person produces good deeds from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil deeds from an evil **heart**. Whatever is in your heart determines what you say. (Luke 6:45) (NLT)

A good man produces good things from the good stored up in his **heart**, and a bad man produce evil things from his own stores of evil. For a man's words will always express what has been treasured in his heart. (Luke 6:45) (Phillips)

Comment: In short a guarded heart should result in guarded lips.

If you effectively protect your car from theft, your home from burglary, your property from damage, your financial interests from failure, and your body from personal illness and injury, and even our borders from terrorist attacks - and yet fail in protecting your heart, this one failure will effect every other area of your life. The thought is that a person's life is somehow determined by or affected by the thoughts stored in one's heart. In other words, "Everything we do comes out of our heart."

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery writes that...

water is a precious resource in the Middle East, and much of what is available comes from natural springs or fountains. **Springs** in the Bible have associations similar to those of rivers and water, but a spring is even more evocative, being upsurging, "living" water that becomes synonymous with the sustaining and refreshment of life. As a perpetual and continuous flow of water, a spring embodies a principle of natural provision that is abundant and irrepressible. Springs in the Bible are almost uniformly positive in association, and the number of references is approximately fifty (since wells are frequently located at the sites of springs, some English translations have fewer references to spring in deference to well). In many of the passages (cp Dt 8:7, Josh 15:19, Jdg 1:15, Ps 104:10, Ps 107:35, Is 35:7, 41:18, 49:10 Re 7:17)... God is clearly the One who has power to produce and dry up springs of water. The imagery of springs of water is integral to Holy Land geography and climate. Because external moisture supplies are precarious, underground sources of water are especially valued.

Springs ([08444](#)) (**towtsa'ah, tots'a'ah, tosaa, tosaah** or **tosa'ot** from the root verb **yasa** = to cause to go out, bring out, lead out) means a border, extremity or end point. The Semantic Domains says that it means a...

starting point, source, wellspring, i.e., the source of an event or activity from the figurative extension of the beginning limit of a space.

Gesenius writes that this word describes...

the place from which (any person or thing) goes forth, hence a gate, Ezek 48:30; a fountain, Pr 4:23, "the fountain of life", of happiness.

Life is the ability to exercise all one's vital power to the fullest. Death is the opposite. The Hebrews viewed man holistically, i.e., body, mind, and spirit were a unified whole. **Life** was associated with health, prosperity, vitality, etc., while death was the very opposite.

This verse relates to something D L Moody once said...

If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself.

UBS Handbook on Proverbs says that...

flow the springs usually refers to the extremity or border of a geographical territory, but in association with life it seems to have the sense of a source or place of origin. The thought is that a person's life is somehow determined by the thoughts stored in the heart or mind: "Everything you do comes out of your heart." CEV says "Carefully guard your thoughts because they are the source of true life." TEV translates this verse into very direct language and may serve as a model for translation (*Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts.*). ([Reyburn, W. D., & Fry, E. M. A handbook on Proverbs. The United Bible Societies' New Testament Handbook Series](#))

Spurgeon writes...

the heart is just the reservoir of man, and our life is allowed to flow in its proper season. That life may flow through different pipes—the mouth, the hand, the eye; but still all the issues of hand, of eye, of lip, derive their source from the great fountain and central reservoir, the heart; and hence there is no difficulty in showing the great necessity that exists for keeping this reservoir, the heart, in a proper state and condition, since otherwise that which flows through the pipes must be tainted and corrupt. May the Holy Spirit now direct our meditations.

D Paul Montague has an interesting paraphrase of **flow the springs of life**...

Be careful how you think, because your thinking results in actions that have either a positive or negative affect upon your territory (sphere of influence).

D A Carson writes that...

The inner person has to be right, because that is the source of all else; but outward behaviour is not just left to work itself out from that. We also have to pay attention to speaking straight (Pr 4:24), looking straight (Pr 4:25), and walking straight (Pr 4:26). (New Bible Commentary)

The KJV Bible Commentary add that..

The heart is the control center for all of life, and the tongue is controlled by the heart (Lk 6:45). A froward mouth reveals a heart filled with pride. Lips that are filled with scorn and arrogance have their roots in a scorner's heart. The issues of life reveal the contents of the heart. Solomon exhorts all to keep the commandments of Yahweh in the midst of the heart and to carefully keep the eyes and feet centered in the ways of the Lord without deviation. The concern of the wise man for the holiness of the whole person is evidenced in these verses. ([Dobson, E G, Charles Feinberg, E Hindson, Woodrow Kroll, H L. Wilmington: KJV Bible Commentary: Nelson](#))

A person's moral attitudes and resultant actions in their life are intimately connected with and influenced by the condition of one's heart or mind (cf. Mt. 12:34, 35; Lk 6:45). **Check your attitudes and actions this past week and you have a good sense of the spiritual condition of your heart!**

Warren Wiersbe comments on **springs of life** noting that...

If we pollute that wellspring, the infection will spread; before long, hidden appetites will become open sins and

public shame. The Bible warns us to avoid a double heart (Ps 12:2), a hard heart (Pr 28:14), a proud heart (Pr 21:4), an unbelieving heart (Heb 3:12-note), a cold heart (Mt 24:12), and an unclean heart (Ps 51:10). "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (Ps 139:23, 24)...

Wise people are careful about what they read, what they hear and see, and what they talk about in daily conversation. They're diligent to keep trash out of their minds and hearts, because "garbage in" ultimately means "garbage out" (Pr 4:23). For this reason, they carefully control the radio and television and they are selective in their reading...

God's truth should also control the neck, because a man might be tempted to turn his head and look at a beautiful woman for the purpose of lusting (Mt. 5:27, 28, 29, 30-note). He may not be able to avoid seeing the woman the first time, but it's looking the second time that gets him into trouble. (Wiersbe, W. W. Be Skillful. An Old Testament Study. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books)

The Pulpit Commentary explains that...

The fact here stated is that the moral conduct of life, its actions and proceedings, are determined by the condition of the heart. If the heart is pure, the life will be pure; if the heart is corrupt, the life will be corrupt. The heart is here compared with a fountain. The same idea which is affixed to it in its physical sense is also assigned to it in its ethical or moral sense. Physically, it is the central organ of the body; morally, it is the seat of the affections and the centre of the moral consciousness. From this moral centre flow forth "the issues of life;" i.e. the currents of the moral life take their rise in and flow forth from it, just as from the heart, physically considered, the blood is propelled and flows forth into the arterial system, by which it is conveyed to the remotest extremities of the body. And as the bodily health depends on the healthy action of the heart, so the moral health depends on and is influenced by the state in which this spring of all action is preserved. Issues; from yâtsâr, "to go forth," are the place from which anything goes forth, and hence a fountain... With this passage compare our Lord's teaching (Mt 15:19; Mark 7:21, 22, 23; Luke 6:43, 44, 45). (The Pulpit Commentary: Proverbs. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed)

Garrett writes that the heart...

is "the wellspring of life" in that the capacity to live with joy and vigor ultimately comes from within and not from circumstances. The corrupt heart draws one down to the grave, but Wisdom protects the heart from that corruption. This verse, perhaps in conjunction with Ezekiel's vision of the River of Life (Ezek 47:1-12), apparently was the source of Jesus' perplexing citation in John 7:38. (Garrett, D. A. Vol. 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers)

Adam Clarke commenting on **from it flow the springs of life** (For out of it are the issues of life) writes that it literally speaks of...

"the goings out of lives." Is not this a plain allusion to the arteries which carry the blood from the heart through the whole body, and to the utmost extremities? As long as the heart is capable of receiving and propelling the blood, so long life is continued. Now as the heart is the fountain whence all the streams of life proceed, care must be taken that the fountain be not stopped up nor injured. A double watch for its safety must be kept up. So in spiritual things: the heart is the seat of the Lord of life and glory; and the streams of spiritual life proceed from Him to all the powers and faculties of the soul. Watch with all diligence, that this fountain be not sealed up, nor these streams of life be cut off. Therefore "put away from thee a froward mouth and perverse lips-and let thy eyes look straight on." (Pr 4:24) Or, in other words,

look inward—look onward—look upward.

I know that the twenty-third verse is understood as principally referring to the evils which proceed from the heart, and which must be guarded against; and the good purposes that must be formed in it, from which life takes its coloring. The former should be opposed; the latter should be encouraged and strengthened. If the heart be pure and holy, all its purposes will be just and good. If it be impure and defiled, nothing will proceed from it but abomination. But though all this be true, I have preferred following what I believe to be the metaphor in the text.

Roehrs writes that...

As water gushes from an underground spring, wise action originates in inner convictions and drives. Unless one loves the Lord with all one's heart, the potential for evil is not eliminated at its source. (Dt 6:5, 6.; Ps 119:2, 10; Mt 12:34; Mk 7:21; Lk 6:45)

John Flavel very wisely observed that,

The greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God.

Torrey's Topic The Heart

- Issues of life are out of -Proverbs 4:23

GOD

- Tries -1 Chronicles 29:17; Jeremiah 12:3
- Knows -Psalms 44:21; Jeremiah 20:12
- Searched -1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 17:10
- Understands the thoughts of -1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalms 139:2
- Ponders -Proverbs 21:2; 24:12
- Influences -1 Samuel 10:26; Ezra 6:22; 7:27; Proverbs 21:1; Jeremiah 20:9
- Creates a new -Psalms 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26
- Prepares -1 Chronicles 29:18; Proverbs 16:1
- Opens -Acts 16:14
- Enlightens -2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 1:18
- Strengthens -Psalms 27:14
- Establishes -Psalms 112:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:13

SHOULD BE

- Prepared to God -1 Samuel 7:3
- Given to God -Proverbs 23:26
- Perfect with God -1 Kings 8:61
- Applied to wisdom -Psalms 90:12; Proverbs 2:2
- Guided in the right -Proverbs 23:19
- Purified -James 4:8
- Single -Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22
- Tender -Ephesians 4:32
- Kept with diligence -Proverbs 4:23

WE SHOULD

- Believe with -Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10
- Serve God with all -Deuteronomy 11:13
- Keep God's statutes with all -Deuteronomy 26:16
- Walk before God with all -1 Kings 2:4
- Trust in God with all -Proverbs 3:5
- Love God with all -Matthew 22:37
- Return to God with all -Deuteronomy 30:2
- Do the will of God from -Ephesians 6:6
- Sanctify God in -1 Peter 3:15
- Love one another with a pure -1 Peter 1:22
- No man can cleanse -Proverbs 20:9
- Faith, the means of purifying -Acts 15:9
- Renewal of, promised under the gospel -Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26; Hebrews 3:10
- When broken and contrite, not despised by God -Psalms 51:17
- The pure in, shall see God -Matthew 5:8

PRAY THAT IT MAY BE

- Cleansed -Psalms 51:10
- Inclined to God's testimonies -Psalms 119:36
- United to fear God -Psalms 86:11
- Directed into the love of God -2 Thessalonians 3:5
- Harden not, against God -Psalms 95:8; Hebrews 4:7
- Harden not against the poor -Deuteronomy 15:7
- Regard not iniquity in -Psalms 66:18
- Take heed lest it to be deceived -Deuteronomy 11:16
- Know the plague of -1 Kings 8:38
- He that trusts in, is a fool -Proverbs 28:26

Keeping the Heart John Flavel (1630-1691)

Book on Proverbs 4:23

[Alternate Online Source](#)

"one of the greatest Christian books of all time"

- [Proverbs 4:23, The Text Explained](#)
- [Duties Included in Keeping the Heart](#)
- [Reasons Why this Should be the Great Business of Life](#)
- [The Time of Prosperity](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in the Time of Adversity](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in the Time of Zion's Troubles](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in Time of danger and Public Distraction](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in the Time of Outward Wants](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in the Time of Duty](#)
- [Keeping the Heart When We Meet With Great Trials](#)
- [Keeping the Heart When the Hour of Temptation Comes](#)
- [Keeping the Heart in the Time of Doubting and Spiritual Darkness](#)
- [Keeping the Heart When Sufferings for Religion are Laid on Us](#)
- [Keeping the Heart When Sickness Warns of Death Approaching](#)
- [A Special Warning to Hypocrites and Formal Professors](#)
- [A Special Encouragement to the People of God](#)
- [Ten Motives Exhorting to a Hearty Engagement in Keeping the Heart](#)

Ron Maness comments on **John Flavel's book...**

This book has been called by some one of the greatest Christian books of all time.

It is another of the excellent reprints of Puritan books from Soli Deo Gloria. The book, which was originally entitled "A Saint Indeed", is based on Proverbs 4:23, which exhorts us to "keep our heart, for out of it are the issues of life". And Flavel carefully and exhaustively unfolds all that is involved in "keeping" the heart, and how that should be the "great business" of every Christian. Keeping the heart, Flavel would have us to understand, involves the "diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin and maintain its sweet and free communion with God" (page 2 - Ed note: Pages listed do not correspond to the online version but the printed version from Soli Deo Gloria publishing.). At the beginning, Flavel sets forth the doctrine: "The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian's life" (page 3). He lists six acts to help keep the heart carefully: 1) "frequent observation" of the state of the heart (self-examination, self-conferences, etc.), 2) "deep humiliation for heart-evils and disorders" (page 7), 3) "earnest supplications and instant prayer for heart-purifying and rectifying grace" (page 7), 4) "imposing strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more earnestly with God and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin" (page 8) (including for example vows, or Job's "covenant with mine eyes"), 5) "a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts" (page 8), and 6) the

“realizing of God’s presence with us and setting the Lord always before us” (page 8).

He cautions that heart-work is not easy work: “Heart-work is hard work, indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit will cost no great pains. But to set yourself before the Lord, and tie up your loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon Him, will cost you something” (page 9). Not only is it hard work, but it is also a constant work, as it is “never done till life is done” (page 10). Nevertheless, it is an essential work, for without it, Flavel says “we are but formalists in religion; all our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing” (page 10). Then he sets out six reasons why Christians should make this the great business of their lives: 1) the glory of God, 2) the sincerity of our profession, 3) the beauty of our conversation (conduct of life), 4) the improvement of our graces, 5) the comfort of our souls, and 6) the stability of our souls in the hour of temptation (pages 11-22). Among other applications of the doctrine, he discusses 12 special “seasons” in the Christian’s life, which call for special diligence in keeping our hearts. The book is full of wonderful applications, expositions, and exhortations. And yet, it is not a long book, as his actual writing only covers 130 pages. The remainder of the book consists of a 19-page outline, and a 33-page study guide, both by Maureen Bradley, which greatly add to the book’s usefulness. I’ll close this review with the quote of an exhortation from Flavel:

Oh study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts! Away with fruitless controversies and all idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with unprofitable discourse and bold censures of others. Turn in upon yourselves, get into your closets, and now resolve to dwell there. You have been strangers to this work too long; you have kept others’ vineyards too long; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; this world has detained you from your great work too long. **Will you now resolve to look better at your hearts? Will you hate and come out of the crowds of business and clamors of the world and retire yourselves more than you have done?** Oh, that this day you would resolve upon it... All that I beg for is that you would step aside a little more often to talk with God and your own heart...(and) demand this of your own heart, at least every evening, **‘Oh, my heart, where have you been today? Where have you made a road today?’**” (pages 118-119).

This is a book to be read or consulted frequently. (Keeping the Heart Bible.org)

KEEPING AND KEPT Alexander Maclaren

- ‘Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.’— Proverbs 4:23
- ‘Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.’— 1Peter 1:5

The former of these texts imposes a stringent duty, the latter promises divine help to perform it. The relation between them is that between the Law and the Gospel. The Law commands, the Gospel gives power to obey. The Law pays no attention to man’s weakness, and points no finger to the source of strength. Its office is to set clearly forth what we ought to be, not to aid us in becoming so. ‘Here is your duty, do it’ is, doubtless, a needful message, but it is a chilly one, and it may well be doubted if it ever rouses a soul to right action. Moralists have hammered away at preaching self-restraint and a close watch over the fountain of actions within from the beginning, but their exhortations have little effect unless they can add to their icy injunctions the warmth of the promise of our second text, and point to a divine Keeper who will make duty possible.

**We must be kept by God,
if we are ever to succeed in keeping our wayward hearts.**

I. Without our guarding our hearts, no noble life is possible.

The Old Testament psychology differs from our popular allocation of certain faculties to bodily organs. We use head and heart, roughly speaking, as being respectively the seats of thought and of emotion. But the Old Testament locates in the heart the centre of personal being. It is not merely the home of the affections, but the seat of will, moral purpose. As this text says, ‘the issues of life’ flow from it in all the multitudinous variety of their forms. The stream parts into many heads, but it has one fountain. To the Hebrew thinkers the heart was the indivisible, central unity which manifested itself in the whole of the outward life. ‘As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.’ The heart is the man. And that personal centre has a moral character which comes to light in, and gives unity and character to, all his deeds.

That solemn thought that every one of us has a definite moral character, and that our deeds are not an accidental set of outward actions but flow from an inner fountain, needs to be driven home to our consciences, for most of the actions of most men are done so mechanically, and reflected on so little by the doers, that the conviction of their having any moral character at all, or of our incurring any responsibility for them, is almost extinct in us, unless when something startles conscience into protest.

It is this shrouded inner self to which supreme care is to be directed. All noble ethical teaching concurs in this—that a man who seeks to be right must keep, in the sense both of watching and of guarding, his inner self. Conduct is more easily regulated than character—and less worth regulating. It avails little to plant watchers on the stream half way to the sea. Control must be exercised at the source, if it is to be effectual. The counsel of our first text is a commonplace of all wholesome moral teaching since the beginning of the world. The phrase ‘with all diligence’ is literally ‘above all guarding,’ and energetically expresses the supremacy of this keeping. It should be the foremost, all-pervading aim of every wise man who would not let his life run to waste. It may be turned into more modern language, meaning just what this ancient sage meant, if we put it as, ‘Guard thy character with more carefulness than thou dost thy most precious possessions, for it needs continual watchfulness, and, untended, will go to rack and ruin.’ The exhortation finds a response in every heart, and may seem too familiar and trite to bear dwelling on, but we may be allowed to touch lightly on one or two of the plain reasons which enforce it on every man who is not what Proverbs very unpolitely calls ‘a fool.’

That guarding is plainly imposed as necessary, by the very constitution of our manhood. Our nature is evidently not a republic, but a monarchy. It is full of blind impulses, and hungry desires, which take no heed of any law but their own satisfaction. If the reins are thrown on the necks of these untamed horses, they will drag the man to destruction. They are only safe when they are curbed and bitted, and held well in. Then there are tastes and inclinations which need guidance and are plainly meant to be subordinate. The will is to govern all the lower self, and conscience is to govern the will. Unmistakably there are parts of every man’s nature which are meant to serve, and parts which are appointed to rule, and to let the servants usurp the place of the rulers is to bring about as wild a confusion within as the Ecclesiast lamented that he had seen in the anarchic times when he wrote—princes walking and beggars on horseback. As George Herbert has it—

**‘Give not thy humours way;
God gave them to thee under lock and key.’**

Then, further, that guarding is plainly imperative, because there is an outer world which appeals to our needs and desires, irrespective altogether of right and wrong and of the moral consequences of gratifying these. Put a loaf before a starving man and his impulse will be to clutch and devour it, without regard to whether it is his or no. Show any of our animal propensities its appropriate food, and it asks no questions as to right or wrong, but is stirred to grasp its natural food. And even the higher and nobler parts of our nature are but too apt to seek their gratification without having the license of conscience for doing so, and sometimes in defiance of its plain prohibitions. It is never safe to trust the guidance of life to tastes, inclinations, or to anything but clear reason, set in motion by calm will, and acting under the approbation of ‘the Lord Chief Justice, Conscience.’

But again, seeing that the world has more evil than good in it, the keeping of the heart will always consist rather in repelling solicitations to yielding to evil. In short, the power and the habit of sternly saying ‘No’ to the whole crowd of tempters is always the main secret of a noble life. ‘He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down and without walls.’

II. There is no effectual guarding unless God guards.

The counsel in Proverbs is not mere toothless moral commonplace, but is associated, in the preceding chapter, with fatherly advice to ‘let thine heart keep my commandments’ and to ‘trust in the Lord with all thine heart.’ The heart that so trusts will be safely guarded, and only such a heart will be. The inherent weakness of all attempts at self-keeping is that keeper and kept being one and the same personality, the more we need to be kept the less able we are to effect it. If in the very garrison are traitors, how shall the fortress be defended? If, then, we are to exercise an effectual guard over our characters and control over our natures, we must have an outward standard of right and wrong which shall not be deflected by variations in our temperature. We need a fixed light to steer towards, which is stable on the stable shore, and is not tossing up and down on our decks. We shall cleanse our way only when we ‘take heed thereto, according to Thy word.’ For even God’s viceroy within, the sovereign conscience, can be warped, perverted, silenced, and is not immune from the spreading infection of evil. When it turns to God, as a mirror to the sun, it is irradiated and flashes bright illumination into dark corners, but its power depends on its being thus lit by radiations from the very Light of Life. And if we are ever to have a coercive power over the rebellious powers within, we must have God’s power breathed into us, giving grip and energy to all the good within, quickening every lofty desire, satisfying every aspiration that feels after Him, cowing all our evil and being the very self of ourselves.

We need an outward motive which will stimulate and stir to effort. Our wills are lamed for good, and the world has strong charms that appeal to us. And if we are not to yield to these, there must be somewhere a stronger motive than any that the sorceress world has in its stores, that shall constrainingly draw us to ways that, because they tend upward, and yield no pabulum for the lower self, are difficult for sluggish feet. To the writer of this Book of Proverbs the name of God bore in it such a motive. To us the name of Jesus, which is Love, bears a yet mightier appeal, and the motive which lies in His death for us is strong enough, and it alone is strong enough, to fire our whole selves with enthusiastic, grateful love, which will burn up our sloth, and sweep our evil out of our hearts, and make us swift and glad to do all that may please Him. If there must be fresh reinforcements thrown into the town of Mansoul, as there must be if it is not to be captured, there is one sure way of securing these. Our second text tells us whence the relieving force

must come. If we are to keep our hearts with all diligence, we must be 'kept by the power of God,' and that power is not merely to make diversion outside the beleaguered fortress which may force the besiegers to retreat and give up their effort, but is to enter in and possess the soul which it wills to defend. It is when the enemy sees that new succours have, in some mysterious way, been introduced, that he gives up his siege. It is God in us that is our security.

III. There is no keeping by God without faith.

Peter was an expert in such matters, for he had had a bitter experience to teach him how soon and surely self-confidence became self-despair. 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,' was said but a few hours before he denied Jesus. His faith failed, and then the divine guard that was keeping his soul passed thence, and, left alone, he fell.

That divine Power is exerted for our keeping on condition of our trusting ourselves to Him and trusting Him for ourselves. And that condition is no arbitrary one, but is prescribed by the very nature of divine help and of human faith. If God could keep our souls without our trust in Him He would. He does so keep them as far as is possible, but for all the choicer blessings of His giving, and especially for that of keeping us free from the domination of our lower selves, there must be in us faith if there is to be in God help. The hand that lays hold on God in Christ must be stretched out and must grasp His warm, gentle, and strong hand, if the tingling touch of it is to infuse strength. If the relieving force is victoriously to enter our hearts, we must throw open the gates and welcome it. Faith is but the open door for God's entrance. It has no efficacy in itself any more than a door has, but all its blessedness depends on what it admits into the hidden chambers of the heart.

I reiterate what I have tried to show in these poor words. There is no noble life without our guarding our hearts; there is no effectual guarding unless God guards; there is no divine guarding unless through our faith. It is vain to preach self-governing and self-keeping. Unless we can tell the beleaguered heart, 'The Lord is thy Keeper; He will keep thee from all evil; He will keep thy soul,' we only add one more impossible command to a man's burden. And we do not apprehend nor experience the divine keeping in its most blessed and fullest reality, unless we find it in Jesus, who is 'able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.'

KEEPING THE HEART

Charles Simeon

If you don't know who this great brother in Christ is, you need to take a moment and read John Piper's survey of Simeon's life entitled "[Brothers, We Must Not Mind a Little Suffering](#)" - or listen to the Mp3 - you will be as riveted to your seat as I was when I first heard the powerful and convicting testimony of this saint of old.

Pr 4:23. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

IT is certainly of infinite importance that we be deeply convinced of our utter inability to do any thing that is good, and of our entire dependence upon God for the effectual aids of his Holy Spirit. But we must not imagine, that, because we have no sufficiency of ourselves to do the will of God, we are not bound in duty to do it, or not to be exhorted and stimulated to the performance of it. Our duty is the same, whatever be the circumstances to which we have reduced ourselves; and it is in, and by, our personal exertions, that God has promised to "work all our works in us." Hence, in the Scriptures of Truth, we are continually exhorted to serve our God in the way of his commandments. It is obvious that we cannot preserve the life of our bodies for one single moment; yet God expects, that we keep ourselves from those things which would destroy life, and use all proper means of preserving it: so neither can we, of ourselves, preserve the life of our souls; yet are we bound to "keep our heart with all diligence; since out of it are the issues of life."

It is indeed supposed here, that a new heart has been given to us; because from the unregenerated heart no good thing can issue: but inasmuch as even the renewed heart has still innumerable corruptions within it, we must keep it with all diligence.

To impress this duty on our minds, let us consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

"To keep the heart" is indeed an arduous task. To assist you in the performance of it, we will offer such suggestions as appear suitable to the occasion:

1. Fortify it with good principles—

A city unfortified is open to assault on every side: and so is the heart, if not duly fortified by the principles of true religion. As a sinner

redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit, I am the Lord's peculiar property: I live by him; and I must live for him: "having been bought with a price, I am not my own, but his" who bought me: and I have nothing to do but to "glorify him with my body and my spirit, which are his." When therefore any thing attempts to gain possession of my heart, I must keep it for Him; for Him wholly; for Him alone. Nothing is to break in upon this principle. Let earth and hell assault me, I must oppose them in this impregnable bulwark; "Depart from me, ye evil-doers; I will keep the commandments of my God." The Christian is furnished by God with armour for this contest; and, clothed in this panoply, he must maintain the conflict even unto death.

2. Watch all its most secret motions—

A citadel, however strong, if filled with traitors waiting for an occasion to open it to the enemy, needs to be guarded with peculiar care: the professed defenders of it must themselves be watched. So it is with the heart, notwithstanding it be at present garrisoned for the Lord. It is inconceivably difficult in many instances to distinguish between the loyal and the treacherous. They are both habited in the same uniform; and both make the very same professions: both too appear actuated by the same holy zeal. The Apostles, when disputing with each other who should be the greatest, and forbidding others to cast out devils, because they followed not with them, and desiring to call fire from heaven to avenge their Master's cause, appeared as faithful as men could be: yet were they in reality actuated by pride and envy, in the garb of zeal and love: and, had not these corrupt passions been checked at first, who can tell, "how great a matter this little fire might have kindled?" There is not a motion of the heart but must be strictly marked: its associates must be carefully noticed; its tendencies examined; its professions scrutinized; lest Satan himself be found there, under the semblance of an angel of light.

3. Combine all its energies in the service of your God—

The Psalmist has a remarkable expression on this subject; "Unite my heart, O Lord, to fear thy name." If the powers of the soul be scattered, they will be as inefficient as soldiers that are dispersed. It is by a combination of efforts for a preconcerted end, and by simultaneous movements for its accomplishment, that success is attained. The various powers of the soul must act in unison: the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience, must all have the same object in view, each defending its proper post to the uttermost, and ready to succour the other with all its might. If, whilst the understanding is occupied about spiritual and heavenly things, the will and the affections are running after earthly and carnal things, what can be expected, but that the enemy shall soon gain undisguised and permanent possession of the soul? Every one knows, that "a house divided against itself, falleth;" and a divided heart must become a prey to the great adversary of God and man. All its powers must center in God, if God is to inhabit it as his temple, and to possess it as his inheritance.

4. Call in for it the most effectual aid—

Human efforts, unassisted by God, will be of little avail. Indeed we can do nothing but as we are assisted by "the Captain of our Salvation." To him then must we look to "strengthen us with might by his Spirit in our inward man:" we must go forth against our enemies, as David did against Goliath, not in dependence on an arm of flesh, but in the name of the Lord God of Israel: we must "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Then we may defy all our adversaries: we may boldly ask the greatest amongst them; "Who art thou, O thou great Mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." See how Paul taught the first Christians to triumph, whilst yet in the midst of all their conflicts: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: in all these things we are more than conquerors:" so then may the weakest of us triumph, if we call in our blessed Lord to our aid: for "through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things."

But to form a right judgment of our duty, we must yet more distinctly notice,

II. The particular instruction relating to it—

We must keep our heart "with all diligence."

Our attention to it must be,

1. Earnest—

It is not a slight or superficial attention to it that will suffice. The work is too great to be effected in such a way. To keep the heart from sin amidst so many temptations on every side, and to keep it in the exercise of all holy and heavenly graces, from every one of which it is by nature alienated; this is a great work indeed, and requires the utmost possible exertion on our part. The metaphors by which the Christian's life is set forth, sufficiently shew what efforts are called for on our part. A race is not to be won without straining every nerve: an adversary, whether in fight or in wrestling, is not to be overcome without putting forth all our strength. Can we then suppose, that, when our contest is not with flesh and blood only, but with all the principalities and powers of hell, the victory can be gained without the most strenuous exertions? No; it cannot: and our Lord plainly tells us that it cannot: "Strive," says he, "to enter in at the strait gate: for many shall seek to enter in, and not be able." Know then, that whatever you have to do in the keeping of your

heart, you must “do it with all your might.”

2. Constant—

The work which we have to do, is not like that of a painter or a statuary, who may leave his work for a time, and find it afterwards in the state in which he left it: it is rather like that of one who is rolling up hill a stone, which will return upon him, as soon as ever he intermits his labour. Our hearts of themselves are “bent to backslide from God,” ever ready to “start aside as a deceitful bow:” and Satan is ever on the watch to draw us aside. If he intermit his labours, it is in appearance only, and not in reality: for he is ever “going about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” His wiles and devices are innumerable: and, if once he can find us off our guard, he will assuredly avail himself of the occasion to deceive and, if possible, to destroy us. We therefore must be always “on our watch-tower,” according to that direction of our blessed Lord, “Watch and pray; lest ye enter into temptation: and, what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.”

3. Persevering—

There is no state at which we can arrive in this world that supersedes the necessity of continued vigilance and care. Were we as eminent as Paul himself, we must still, like him, “keep our body under and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, we ourselves become castaways.” Let our circumstances be ever so favourable, we know not but that we shall fall the very next moment. Hezekiah was but just recovered from a dangerous illness, and that by miracle; yet when the Babylonish ambassadors came to offer him their master’s congratulations, he fell, and offended God by “the pride of his heart.” Peter also was but just descended from Mount Tabor, where he had beheld his Lord transfigured, and shining forth in all his glory, when he acted Satan’s part in dissuading his Lord from completing the work assigned him: so that he drew forth from his Divine Master that just reprimand, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” We may add too, that there is no wickedness so great, but we may be drawn to the commission of it. Who can reflect on David’s adultery and murder, or on Peter’s denial of his Lord with oaths and curses, and not see reason to cry continually to God, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe!”

Thus then we see, it is not enough to keep our hearts, but we must “keep them with all diligence,” engaging in the work with earnestness, and maintaining it with constancy and perseverance to the latest hour of our lives.

Let us now attend to,

III. The reason with which both the one and the other are enforced—

The heart may in some respects be considered as the seat of vitality in the human body, because from thence issues the blood that circulates through the whole frame. But still more may it be said of the heart in a spiritual view, that out of it are the issues of life. For,

1. It is the proper source of all evil—

There are many evils to which our corrupt nature is apt to yield: some are spiritual, and some are fleshly: but the womb where all are generated, and from whence they proceed, is the heart. Adultery, and murder, and theft, with many other evils, might be supposed to arise rather out of external circumstances connected with our outward man: but they are all traced by our blessed Lord to the heart: “From within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these things come from within.” Now, if the heart be the fruitful spring of such evils, ought it not to be watched? ought it not to be kept with all diligence? It is evident that, without continual care, the whole man would soon be inundated with evil: should we not then watch the sluices? should we not guard the banks, and keep them in good repair? In other words, should we not do all in our power to prevent such fatal effects? Let it never be forgotten, that the smallest breach in a bank will soon yield to the torrent, and, by its extension, bid defiance to any remedy that can be applied: consequently, if we would not be overrun with all manner of evil, we must guard against the irruption of any. “A little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump.”

2. It is the proper seat of all good—

Grace is planted in the heart: it has no other residence: it may operate by the members: but its seat is in the heart. Repentance flows from thence, even from “the broken and contrite heart.” Faith has there its first formation. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” Love combines and concentrates all its powers: “We are to love God with all the heart;” yea, “Christ himself dwells in our hearts by faith.” Whatever then proceeds not from the heart, is of no value: all our best services for God are no other than hypocrisy, if the heart be far from him. Must we not then keep the heart with all diligence, to see that it be duly influenced by divine grace, and that all which we do is the result of gracious principles implanted there? Truly, if “a man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and, after all, be no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal,” because his actions proceed not from a principle of love in the heart, we are called upon to watch over our hearts with all imaginable care, that they be duly stored with all that is good. This is the plain and obvious inference from what our Lord himself hath distinctly affirmed in those

memorable words. “The evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; and the good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good:” in both cases the produce is “from the abundance of the heart:” and “the tree is known by its fruits.”

3. By it shall our state be determined in the last day—

Even in courts of judicature amongst ourselves, it is not so much the act, as the heart, that is the object of investigation. Murder itself is not accounted murder, if it was not attended with a purpose of heart to injure and destroy. Much more therefore may it be expected that God will inquire into the designs and purposes of our hearts: “He looketh not on the outward appearance, but at the heart:” and “he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, on purpose to give to every man according to the fruit of his doings.” For this end “he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.” To our hearts then must we look, if ever we would give up our account with joy: for, as our hearts are, so shall we appear in his sight. Let us then not only search and try ourselves, but beg of God also to “search and try us, and to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting.”

Application

1. Grudge not your labour in the way to heaven—

You cannot make any attainments in this life without labour: how then can you hope to attain without it the glory and felicity of heaven? True it is, that heaven is a gift of God; a gift altogether of his free and sovereign grace: but it is also true, that we must labour for it, according to that direction of our Lord; “Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.” Labour then with all earnestness, and constancy, and perseverance. If you be frequently foiled, still return to your post, and increase your vigilance in proportion as you discover the deceitfulness and wickedness of your hearts: and be assured, that, however great your toil may be, heaven will be an abundant recompence for all.

2. Doubt not but that your labour shall at last be crowned with success—

Were your success dependent on an arm of flesh, you might well despond: but your God and Saviour is pledged to “carry on in you the work he has begun,” and to “perfect that which concerneth you.” Your enemies may renew their assaults as often as they will; but they shall not prevail: for God has said, that “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper:” and again. “The law of God is in his heart: his footsteps shall not slide.” Go on then: “watch ye: stand fast in the faith; quit you like men: be strong:” and know for your comfort what the all-gracious and unchanging God hath spoken: “Be not weary in well-doing: for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.” (Simeon, C. 1832-63. *Horae Homileticae* Vol. 7: Proverbs to Isaiah 26)

A Reflective Lifestyle

Proverbs 4:23-27

- CONSCIENTIOUS HEART - Pr 4:23
- CONTROLLED MOUTH - Pr 4:24
- CONSECRATED EYES - Pr 4:25
- CONSIDERED PATHS - Pr 4:26-27

Kept Heart Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

- A KEPT HEART IS A BELIEVING HEART – Romans 10:9, 10
- A KEPT HEART IS A SPEAKING HEART – Romans 10:9, 10
- A KEPT HEART IS A SPIRIT-FILLED HEART – Ephesians 5:18
- A KEPT HEART IS A SINGING HEART – Eph 5:19, 20, Colossians 3:16
- A KEPT HEART IS A SANCTIFIED HEART – 1Pe 1:15, 16, 3:15